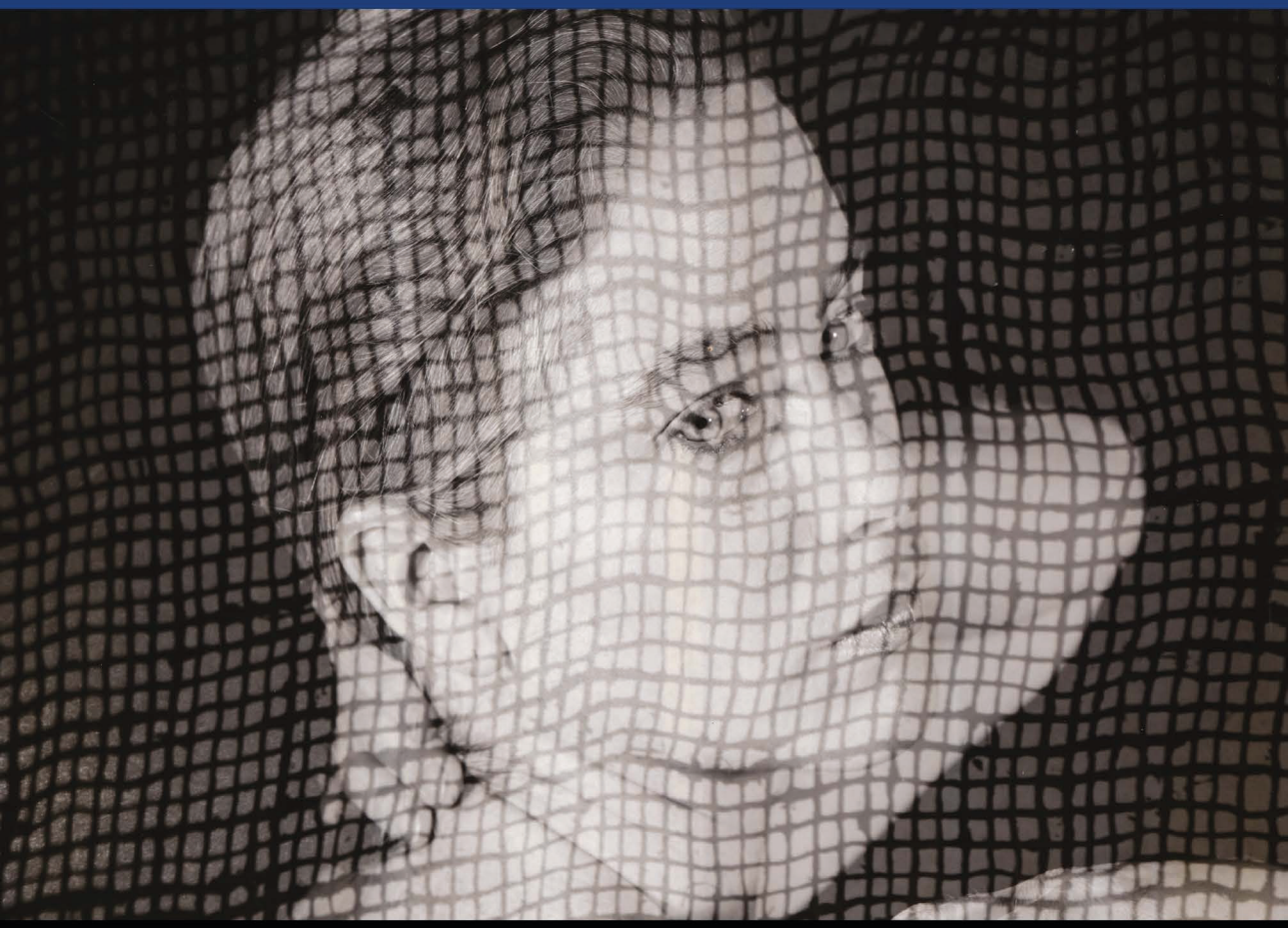
THE SELFIE, TEMPORALITY, AND CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHY



ROUTLEDGE HISTORY OF PHOTOGRAPHY

CLAIRE RAYMOND

The Selfie, Temporality, and Contemporary Photography

This book is a theoretical examination of the relationship between the face, identity, photography, and temporality, focusing on the temporal episteme of selfie practice.

Claire Raymond investigates how the selfie's involvement with time and self emerges from capitalist ideologies of identity and time. The book leverages theories from Katharina Pistor, Jacques Lacan, Rögnvaldur Ingthorsson, and Hans Belting to explore the ways in which the selfie imposes a dominant ideology on subjectivity by manipulating the affect of time. The selfie is understood in contrast to the self-portrait. Artists discussed include James Tylor, Shelley Niro, Ellen Carey, Graham MacIndoe, and LaToya Ruby Frazier.

The book will be of interest to scholars working in visual culture, history of photography, and critical theory. It will also appeal to scholars of philosophy and, in particular, of the intersection of aesthetic theory and theories of ontology, epistemology, and temporality.

Claire Raymond is a visiting research associate at Princeton University and a visiting scholar with the department of English at the University of Virginia. She is the author of *Francesca Woodman's Dark Gaze: The Diazotypes and Other Late Works*; *Women Photographers and Feminist Aesthetics*; *Witnessing Sadism in Texts of the American South*; and *Francesca Woodman and the Kantian Sublime*. Her research focuses on aesthetics, poetics, and the intersections of cultural trauma and representation.

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The Selfie, Temporality, and Contemporary Photography

Claire Raymond

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Cover image: Ellen Carey, *Mesh*, 1984, silver diffusion transfer print, 26 × 22 in. Amon Carter Museum of American Art, Fort Worth, Texas. Courtesy of the artist.

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1 Dreaming the Self

Selfie Practice, Temporality, and Artificial Intelligence

This book began as a dream, prosaic and actual. I dreamed a book mapping divergences of selfie practice and self-portrait photography, and I dreamed the table of contents, an outline. None of that corresponds to this book as it is written. Nothing is left, here, from that dream. But the book had its inception in this dream: on waking, I wrote down the dreamed book outline. This idea has since been revised over and over until the trace of the dream book is gone. Even as the contents of this book are not those of my dreamed outline, I relate this inception story because it reveals something fundamental to the material: selfies, to a degree unlike non–social media self-portraits, exist in a blind spot of identity, connected to the oneiric. Selfie practice mines the terrain of the oneiric, where identity is configured without intention. Selfie creation and circulation in social media are less deliberate representations of self; rather, for their faithful practitioners, they *are* selfhood as such, unthought, habitual, enacted in the moment, in the way that dreams appear.

In writing about the temporality of the selfie, then, I am entering the space of the oneiric, where time and self merge through symbol. It's a bad dream, mostly, reflecting the unsettling quality of the affect-drenched realm of selfie practice, a realm that bends the feeling, or affect, of time. Reiterative, the recurrent dream of the selfie is the imprimatur to take another shot, another shot of self, and post it quickly to become that which is seen.[1] Not being a digital native, I inspect the temporality of selfie practice from the vantage of another time zone. My cohort time zone of Gen X, with its faith in nothing, holds a kind of frozen ennui. Gen X members participate in selfie practice, but we are not natives to it.[2] The temporal aspect of the selfie is the key of this book: the way that the selfie sells a compulsive blunting of the affect of time is the thread by which I understand the phenomenon.

Teaching a colloquium on the selfie, at a university in the American Southeast while I was drafting this book, I saw that for my undergraduate students the selfie was not a representation of self, it was the self. Selfie practice functions as a repository of memory, identity's meaning in time. The phrase *digital native* commonly refers to those born around the turn of the 21st century. For this generation, digitized data—selfie posts—are not a form of self-expression. The data are home. In the way that Gaston Bachelard described the dream house as the space where the imagination is contained, for digital natives, social media is the dream house.[3] It holds their identities, a memory palace. Whereas Bachelard contends that physical spaces, in particular the first house, the house of one's infancy or childhood, structure one's symbolic sense of

self, for digital natives the house of childhood is social media. The idea fueling selfie practice isn't narcissism, and it also isn't a triumphal civic unity without boundaries. It is a dream place where all that one feels is laid out in posts. The fear of losing those posts, of losing the memory of the self, the fear of the loss of self not through social media but *despite* social media, drives the dream-like compulsion of selfie practice.

This book includes discussion of selfies and of self-portrait photographs, noting how they are dissimilar. So, at the outset I offer a definition. A selfie is a photographically based digital image, typically edited by one or more photo-editing apps, created of the self by the self for the purpose of social media circulation, ensconced within social media.[4] Hence, Robert Cornelius did not take the first selfie when he created a daguerreotype self-portrait in 1839. He created a self-portrait using daguerreotype technology. Some of the late 20th-century, pre–social media self-images created by Cindy Sherman move toward selfie practice, in their imbrication of preexisting image-worlds and scripted social circulations, but her *Untitled Film Stills* even so are not selfies.[5] The selfie is embedded in social media, a 21st-century phenomenon. The selfie-self is always already set in fixed parameters in that it exists on a social media platform and cannot move beyond those parameters without ceasing to be a selfie. A photographic self-portrait taken with a phonecam or computer webcam is not necessarily a selfie. The selfie is that which is intended to be, and is, shared on social media. It is, as Paul Frosh observes, inherently phatic.[6]

This book discusses ways that the temporal episteme of self-portrait photographs is distinct from that of the selfie. Differing from a photographic self-portrait, a selfie is defined by its ritualistic use in social media, an image geared to be shared, *seen* by algorithms, circulated by algorithms. Selfie carries always its intention for consumption. On social media, the claim that one might ever take a selfie *just for oneself* abrades the reality that selfies are posted for circulation and consumption by others and—paramount—always already to be seen by artificial intelligence (AI), the integral component of social media platforms. In this realm, conceptually and aesthetically, there is no private self, instead there is the ever-seen self, seen by social media AI and by human participants after that. The reality of social media is not that it secretly robs users of privacy but that it transparently and on the surface depends on people choosing to forgo their privacy. As Adorno said of the Enlightenment, "it is the disenchantment of world," so selfie practice is the disenchantment of identity.[7] The selfie is the self-portrait unhaunted.

Grift Time

Above all, this book thinks through the selfie as a manifestation of capitalist temporality. This admittedly narrow approach allows me to access the eerie strangeness of selfie practice, its radical difference from other forms of self-imaging. The temporality of the selfie, I argue, manifests as an affect, and I read this temporal affect of selfie practice in chapters contending with capitalism, embodied mortality, AI, the mask, and celebrity. I read the selfie in contrast to the photographic self-portrait, arguing for their nonsimilarity in specifically their differential relationship to temporality, to embodied mortal time. In that the posted selfie is always already received by AI, that is, by social media platforms, the temporality of selfie practice is inextricably imbricated with the temporality of capitalist numerical code. From this perspective, it makes little sense to interpret an individual selfie as an image qua image. Rather, the

selfie is always already immersed in the flow of images that feed the algorithmic seeing of social media practice. Of course, one can take a given selfie and remove it from social media, as Richard Prince has done. But at that point, the image is no longer a selfie. Indeed, that may be precisely Prince's point: he can nab other people's selfies and present them as his own works because once they are no longer within social media, they are no longer selfies.

Selfie is as selfie does: an image of the self, by the self, for social media, in social media. And social media is run by algorithms. One's first and last audience, for the selfie, is AI. Hence, my own gaze on the selfie, in this book, is as much as possible from the perspective of AI. That is, I never want to lose sight of the fact that in social media the motor of vision is not primarily human but primarily AI. Social media's acts of seeing and being seen are secondarily human: people post and respond to posts. But that activity is secondary, coming after the essential "seeing" of AI that powers social media platforms. So seen, the selfie-self is created in the image of capitalist time. The temporality of the selfie is that of productivity without end and without purpose, an algorithmic extension.

By tilting the gaze this way, I am admittedly writing an eccentric book, that is, writing in a direction never in disagreement with but somewhat outside the arc of this past decade's rich dialogue regarding selfie practice in media studies. Much of value has been said about selfie practice as a human, social practice, with foundational works by Paul Frosh, Derek Conrad Murray, Marcy J. Dinius, Lauren Cornell, and Angus Kennedy and James Panton in particular.[8] But it is only by looking at selfie practice as a primarily *not* human practice, rather a primary site of AI gazing, that one accesses the eerie and different temporal episteme that is the selfie-world. This book, then, concerns itself with the temporality of the selfie as an affective episteme that is the manifestation of capitalist time, time coded as product.

A book on the selfie inevitably contends with questions of identity. One cannot theorize the selfie without a notion of self. This book's notion of identity extends from phenomenological work on embodied cognition, in particular the revisions of Edmund Husserl's phenomenology that Maurice Merleau-Ponty offers, and Graham Harman's contemporary work in object-oriented ontology.[9] Drawing from their theories of ontology, I argue against the ideology of self as exclusively performative, developing a theory of self as caught in time's encompassing affect. Identity is imbricated with the affect of time, an aspect of time, a codependent of the embodied temporal fold. Hence, mere performativity is insufficient ontological ground to heft identity, even as the surface or mask of what passes for "self" is always knitted with the performative. As Graham Harman argues, we know the world of objects, materiality, through our own embodied spatiality, and this knowledge also is a temporal embodiedness. Conceptual structures of linguistic ontology do not create the illusion of embodiment, nor do they create the impossibility of knowing embodiment; rather they extend from the temporal embeddedness that is identity's core.[10] It is selfie's numbing and suppressing of the temporal episteme that focuses and mobilizes this book.

The Emptiness of Time

The core concern of this book, the temporal episteme of selfie practice, raises the question of how to define time. Contemporary logical theories of time, particularly the work of Rögnvaldur Ingthorsson on which this book draws to define "time,"

are influenced by logician James McTaggart's early 20th-century work on the subject.[11] McTaggart, through formal logic, questions the disjunctions of standard notions of time.[12] In calling time illusory, McTaggart is not positing a loopy sci-fi scenario of time travel and wormholes. Rather, he points to a logical incompatibility to conceptualizations of time—as unbounded series, fluent motion, and, as static quality, fixed set—which is not to say that time doesn't exist but that our quotidian conceptualizations of it don't reflect its insolvable ambiguity. Time is circular and linear (that is diurnal and historical); it is fixed and fluent (events do not change in their temporal relationship to each other but every event changes its temporal place). McTaggart notes that any event is at one point the future, becomes the present, then becomes the past, and yet it's also clearly the case that events remain in immovable sequential relationship to each other—the year 1000 CE will always come before the year 2000 CE, and so on, in parity. The relationship between the stability of temporal difference (the year when I was age 6 will always be earlier than the year when I am age 46) and the fluidity of temporal quality (the year of my being age 6 was at one time in the future, then became the present, and is now the past) is one of radical incompatibility. As a logical impossibility, continuously fluid time and rigidly fixed temporal relationships, contends McTaggart, function as a dual illusion.

Selfie time extends and intensifies this illogic of time. The time of the selfie is paradoxically never-now (seeing the image is always slightly belated; planning the image always slightly anticipatory). The never-now temporality of selfie practice I align with McTaggart's theory of time's illusory curve. McTaggart's paradox argues that the incompatibility of Line A of time—that each step of time is defined as past, present, and future—and Line B of time—that temporal events do not change in their relationship to each other—suggests time's illusion, as it is described as both absolute movement (time is always passing) and complete stasis (the past is always in the same fixed relationship to the present and future).[13] McTaggart's work does not contest the second law of thermodynamics that all physical systems move toward entropy. Rather McTaggart argues that our temporal episteme, our experience of time, is endowed with a quality of insolvable illusion. Ingthorsson argues that time is a series of now moments that we fill with the illusion of stability garnered by cultural concepts of future and past. The time of the selfie is never *now*; selfie time is anticipatory and belated, but never precisely of the moment.

Drawing from McTaggart and Ingthorsson, I proffer that *time* is the term we use to describe the affective condition of the embodied epistemic rhythm. My thesis on selfie temporality is that everyday time, however illogical its conceptual structure, is experienced as an enveloping affect, as the feeling of time's immersion is one of paradoxical loss and plenitude. Diurnal time is continuously experienced as being made up of moments that are ending; there is always more time as such but not always more time for a particular activity or identity. Selfie practice falls into this paradox. A selfie is planned for and then looked at, but the *moment* of the selfie's creation is vacuous. In social media practice, the selfie is valued for the responses it engenders. The act of taking it is a null moment. Time is sponged away in its presence and pressed to either side—future and past—in selfie practice.

This understanding of time does not, as noted, encroach on definitions of time in physics (although physicist Julian Barbour uses McTaggart's approach).[14] Even so, unlike light or gravity, time is a mode of measurement rather than only a quality to be measured.[15] Hence, the affective weight of time works differently from other concepts

of physical modalities. As Rögnvaldur Ingthorsson argues, conceptualization of time emerges from a specified metaphysics.[16] Johannes Fabian's seminal work on Western concepts of time as foundational to the violent social dominance tactics of colonization suggest that concepts of time are just that: concepts, social constructs.[17] Throughout this book, I draw from the arguments of Fabian and Ingthorsson regarding time to shape an interpretative rubric of time as embodiment, a constraint relative to culture, and it is my own suggestion that time is an *affect*—an encompassing mood.[18]

I suggest that selfie practice is continually involved in manipulating the *affect* of time.[19] Time's episteme is a structure of feeling that we codify as measuring the material, embodied, change in which we exist.[20] We say, *time has passed*, meaning change has occurred and there is no way to return to the original state of affairs. And whatever we once thought was the original state of affairs was itself never fixed and never still and was never original, rather part of the experience of temporal mutation.

Experientially, the self, identity, exists in time. The incessant self-division of time, though, is hardly stable; it is continuous and episodic. As Hans-Georg Moeller and Paul J. D'Ambrosio make the case, the self is constantly assembled in the face of changing events and circumstances.[21] It is a question of entering power structures you often cannot control.[22] Philosophers Julia Kristeva, Nicolas Abraham, and Phillippe Lacoue-Labarthe posit that voice, language, and music (and, by extrapolation, image) contain and hold the subject.[23] It is this capacity for containing and holding the temporal episteme that makes the self-portrait a capacious space of self-confrontation, confronting time's cut, of the psyche, and so a way toward wholeness.[24] It is precisely in the field of the temporal episteme that longing, as identity's core, abides. But whereas self-portraiture can stage a healing confrontation with lack, selfie practice, because of its frame in social media, locks the image within the supervisory algorithmic gaze of AI. A selfie yet to be taken and a selfie that has been taken and is a "throwback" are both no longer relevant in ways that are not true of past and future identity as such.

Melancholy Time

Over the course of the past four years, I took a handful of photographs of my face while at my desk using my computer's webcam. I did nothing with them, and when the geriatric computer died I did not transfer the images to my new computer. I wasn't sure why I started taking them, but looking back, this small series of images, taken sporadically over the course of four years, was a way for me to understand turning 50. These images are like selfies in that I took them of myself using a screen camera, but they were not selfies in that I did not share them on social media or with anyone in any way. They were not saved in the cloud. It didn't matter to me when they disappeared. They were processual for me to see myself, as a mode of understanding what it means to close out one's youth. When it was over, it was over. No need to archive these images, as the transformation is now complete in its private meaning. Needless to say, this process was melancholy, a mode of accepting, on some level, my own irreversible path toward nonexistence. A melancholic, private act. But it was also healing precisely because of its privacy.

Selfies are all about heralding the gaze of the other, grabbing the gaze of the other, seizing the gaze of the other. The gaze of the other, ensconced in social media, brings in temporal variation. My (hypothetical) selfie I produce only for your gaze and

hence also for *your* time. As a selfie-self, I wait for you, I exist only once you see me. One may argue that all knowledge of the self is imbricated socially. And definitions of the self as arising only and solely in response to others, fail ultimately through incompleteness in that they lack ontological anchorage. Instead, a theory of identity as I limn it in this book emerges from Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological theory of aesthetics and Graham Harman's object theory of aesthetics. Identity is haunted by the other, but it also resists the totalizing conscription of the other's power. It matters, then, that the possibilities of self in the selfie are inherently delimited at the point of the other's gaze. As a selfie-self, my existence in this elongated temporal patience—this waiting, this suffering, attending to the gaze of you, the other—also multiplies you into the gaze of a hoped-for thousand or million others, to *like* or *share* my image. In selfie practice, the more who see me, the more I *am* because myself seeing myself alone (as such) is without meaning in selfie time.[25] The selfie is offered to the gaze of social media, an abstraction of social media companies selling all they can learn of selfie posters—through users' practices—as a dataset among other datasets. In this sense, selfie practice is the pictorial formation of waiting in line. Except it is *online,* an algorithmic net that shifts through ever-more sophisticated patterns of machine learning.

The selfie is created, experienced, and manifested as a social media image. A selfie is not a selfie before it is posted, and, possibly, it is scarcely a selfie a few months *after* it is received (inasmuch as the nature of such images is to be discarded, either immediately on Snapchat or to effectively vanish in the massive unmemorable flow of Instagram). Instead, it is a selfie only *in* that charged gap, the reception of followers and the numerical vision of AI. The selfie is created to cull watchers (to grab them). After AI sees the number of these watchers and the next day comes, yesterday's selfie is over as a selfie. This is why old selfies, even ones from a few months ago, appear dated, whereas self-portraits, even ones from 100 years ago, can maintain their potent stare. The term *throwback* in social media can apply to images from any time other than right now. History is yesterday, literally.

What makes a selfie different from self-portraits (a genre of visual work that has existed since the early Renaissance, or, if we widen the scope to include written self-portraits, then since Augustine of Hippo's *Confessions*) is the selfie's inclusion of AI as audience in the very germ of the idea of self; the desire embedded in the selfie to rise to the top of others' social media feeds, that is, to be algorithmically successfully seen.[26] From Facebook and Instagram emerge threads of perpetually unstable paradoxically guaranteed social existences, an eerie aporia-infested sense of being catered to (by algorithms and influencers) as if outside embodied mortal time. By *paradoxically guaranteed*, I mean that once I've begun posting selfies on social media and attained followers, I'm overwhelmingly likely to get some response to new posts, because that is how the system works. The sense of being compelled to post repeatedly is entwined with the sense of being compelled to respond to posts. The illusion of being outside time, in selfie-world, depends on masking this work of participation as freely chosen pleasure.

This paradoxical compulsory freedom of social media is integrally part of the lost and found temporal pace of the selfie-self in social media, that is, its staccato temporality. The gaze of the viewer (the primary viewer being AI that facilitates social media platforms) is always already inserted into the image, in selfie presentation, instating an aporia between the image and the human gaze *into* the image. In other words, an

image, say for continuity's sake a photographic image, not created for social media contains the *possibility* of being seen. That possibility is its authority, and its risk. But an image created to be posted on social media contains the *certainty* of being seen. It will always be seen by AI, which runs social media, and that caged certainty shapes the core of the selfie's temporality of visibility.

A New Look

In this book, I consider how the gap between AI seeing and human seeing inflects selfie's temporality. The different temporalities of self-portraiture and selfie inhere, fundamentally, in the difference between how AI "sees" and how human beings see. Contingent visibility attends printed photographs. Analog film photography, emerging from the darkroom, carries the risk of objects that it will not be seen. Social media selfie images by contrast are always already seen. Once posted, AI sees them even if no human being ever sees them. But because social media is set up so that people are softly compelled to view new posts (this is called *participation*), selfies do not risk not being seen in the same way as photographic self-portraits. AI seeing is the core of selfie image temporality. This seeing—the continuous unfolding event of AI seeing posted selfies—is the selfie's blind field, the circumstance of our social media circumference within the gaze of AI.

The loop of social media algorithms and selfie performance is this circular manipulation of a human practitioner's feeds, opening a space wherein embodied and mortal temporalities are elided in favor of the endless staccato presentation of the images, memes, and short verbal posts of social media. Essential and nonincidental to the experience of social media is the experience of an aporia not *between* real and false but rather *through* partially embodied cognition (looking at and manipulating the screen) and temporal fragmentation (AI's mode of seeing). An error term is inherent in the temporality of selfie practice, an assumption that time can be translated into image.[27] The loop entwining selfie culture and social media algorithms, fueled by the error term of never being able to access the randomly embodied experience (of identity in space-time) through social media, creates a temporal structure that depends on an experiential gap, a mis-seeing, endemic to social media.

In selfie practice the disparate *nows* of temporal affect are kitted up through repetitious image creation. Every selfie is presented as a false *now*, created as a future, received as a past. Planning the future of the selfie series of each practitioner is linked to the person's always possible but never secured future. All futures we might strive to plan for are hypothetical, but selfie practice is derivative of any future that arrives to us.[28] The present tense, which pretends to be what is presented in the selfie, is elided in social media practice, as the moment of taking the selfie is slightly earlier than the moment of viewing the selfie, both of them slightly premature and belated to the conjoined experience of the present. The selfie-self, then, is the place of discarded time, the post already posted. And yet, paradoxically, against this obvious sense in which selfies are made to be discarded—more so than analog photographs, selfies enter a structure of viewing that *intends* to discard them, in the sense of no one returning to look at them—social media platforms reshape the experience of time along the capitalist model of prizes.[29] Through selfie practice, as social media platforms modulate it, the prize of likes, shares, of this seeming proof of having been seen, props up the selfie practitioner against experiencing time's nullity, its emotive place of the always

discarded. But the prop is ever fragile and requires continuous repetition of posting of the self to maintain a feeling of numbing time.

Selfie practice is social interaction mediated by capitalist platforms that hide in plain sight, leaving only our experience of aporia of interaction, gaps in time. By posting a selfie on Instagram one doesn't think, "I am supporting Mark Zuckerberg" (because he owns Instagram). One thinks, "I am expressing myself." Showing my abs, eye makeup, travels, new baby, whatever it is. Likewise, looking at Instagram selfies, whether those be posted by experimental artist Juliana Huxtable or someone with far lesser (or nonexistent) artistic gifts, feels free, untrammeled by capitalist constraints such as bricks-and-mortar museum buildings that must be kept up through wealthy donors and that one often has to pay to enter, or galleries whose patrons—and thus their patrons' sense of belonging—must belong to a certain social set. The social media experience is that of attempting to release oneself from embodied time and from what feels like capitalism only to become more deeply ensnared in both. One marks time through the endless staccato plink of posting selfies, of watching others' selfies, of endless replication of the body's image through this capitalist vehicle (social media) that is entirely exchange value and devoid of use value.

The term *platform* suggests capitalist-industrial spaces of waiting—for trains, subways, commuter rails. Through the platform, social media companies transport images of bodies rather than bodies themselves. The platform ensconces the images shown, and is both substrate and limit of what can be shown on social media. The time of the selfie on this platform is the time of waiting, of acceding to visibility. Waiting for responses to posts is the time of waiting to board the train, subway, airplane, or commuter rail.[30]

Temporality is performative in selfie practice. If Kant argues that the unity of apperception explains our sense of having a stable identity across time—that we know space and time and learn everything else—selfie practice elides this unity precisely by striving to perform it.[31] Space and time in selfie practice are experientially unfixed, because of the slippage in time between when you see a post and when it's posted. The self emergent through selfie practice is a series of little selves unified not by presence in space-time but instead by a tagline, a title that contains the images, a titular self.

The temporality of social media with all the internet's advertised gains of speed is the temporality of aporia, the constant friable time of anticipating and waiting for reply, for posts, the gap between the immediacy of the physical embodied world and the constantly staccato temporal hesitancy of the social media world; here, aesthetics and temporality are closely knotted.[32] Arguably, social media images are not primarily absorbed as images; rather, the aesthetic experience of social media is one of skewed time—a gap in time, a time outside ordinary time.[33] Selfies are absorbed primarily as temporality skews, secondarily as images.

Transference

The selfie stands in for the self. It becomes the miniature or compressed self presented to the world, as if the gaze of social media were inherently more valuable than embodied interaction. The "selfie," as the name suggests, is a diminutive form of self: it is a picture, of course, a miniature in that most screens that show social media do not have life-size frames (a phone, the most common transfer point of social media, is roughly

the size of your hand, the images shown thereon smaller than that). A selfie is given length and breadth only by the subject's constant reiteration of the gesture.

The selfie is a *transfer point* of identity, between the embodied and the digitized. It accepts easy falsification, with filter apps smoothing skin, enlarging eyes, and altering facial features to make women appear to fit stereotypes of Western, colonialist tropes of "beauty."[34] What is fascinating about the selfie is its definitive incompletion. The selfie taker can never stop: within this system of enclosed benumbed temporality there is no goal other than the repetition of the already achieved act of creating the selfie.

Time's Mirror

In this book, I am particularly concerned with the way time and memory work in the selfie. Memory is a product of time: it is what alleviates and also nostalgically aches as events, places, and people recede from view through the inevitability of change. To whom or what do we really hold on? A parent, a spouse, a house; America? Of course, the answer is none of the above. The promise of photography from its inception was, as William Henry Fox Talbot claimed, to "fix the shadow," to capture and hold still the passing facts that make up the material world.[35] But this capture work is always incomplete, as Roland Barthes comments as he seeks the revivification of the dead in *Camera Lucida*.[36]

Of the photograph as replacement for the real, Susan Sontag launched a critique 40 years ago.[37] But her critique was incomplete. As Susie Linfield argues in *The Cruel Radiance*, photography—still photography, that is—has something to offer beyond mere mimicry of what goes away.[38] Does social media? Is the diminutive of self, a "selfie"—posted on social media—a way of holding onto the always passing world, the self therein? To address the way the selfie has being in the dream house of social media users, one has to set aside paradigms of artistic relevance of the images and also paradigms of semiotics. The selfie emerges less from the self-portrait as from the urge to create masks. The selfie is less a system of signs as rather a staccato temporal reiteration of the same tautological sign: *I am I*.

Selfie practice visually rhymes with photographic self-portraiture.[39] But selfie practice is less an extension of photographic self-portraiture and more an incineration of it. The crux of the photographic self-portrait is the uncanny effect that we, the viewer, are seeing the artist see herself as we interlope on a moment of self-confrontation. The selfie, by contrast, plays to us, lacking that which Michael Fried calls absorption.[40] The selfie taker knows she is taking a selfie. The selfie is always already consumed into the flow of selfie practice. Even when the selfie is used as a political tool—as in Ai Weiwei's work, for example—it is not staging the self confronting the self, but rather confronting others.[41] The capacity of a self-portrait photograph to move outside the social space in which it was made and have meaning for a viewer depends on the visual rapprochement of self with self. The war of the self with the self is exposed in—admittedly just a few—photographic self-portraits. By contrast, expert selfie taking is all about angling for the other's look.[42] The photograph is burned by the temporality of the selfie. Instead of allowing the time of viewing to open and close, which is the core premise of photography's aesthetic outside social media, selfie practice seeks continual openness, continual viewing; it sets fire to the window-like temporality of photography.[43] The selfie is not a work of art, because a work of art ends.[44]

Selfie is a visual architecture without materiality; it is a dream house in which the selfie taker installs her tiny and flat self as repository of memory in time. In this book, I consider the temporality of the selfie, ultimately to contrast its instatement of identity with that of the photographic self-portrait. The selfie is above all a mask circulated through the ritual of social media. It isn't really meant to show the self. It is used as masks always are: to enact a persona in a specific, ritualized social context. Hence, Hans Belting's analysis of the mask is an essential anchor for my book's encounter with the selfie.[45]

Susan Sontag's Cave

Art critic Lauren Cornell aptly notes that the overwhelming difference between the number of images posted in social media and what a human being can absorb causes some to go into "complete retreat."[46] By stating that *not* participating in social media is a retreat, Cornell implies that social media is the *only* form of sociality left in this world, which in itself is a reflection of just how deep the temporality of aporia runs in selfie practice. From the view inside social media, only social media manifests as reality.

Here—with the idea of interiority and exteriority across a divide—the specter of Plato's cave emerges from my discourse on the aesthetic of the gap. When I describe the aesthetic of the gap (a gap between the time of the post and the time of its receipt, a gap less like call and response and more like rev and stall) as definitive of social media, I point to the intrinsically staccato and gap-filled temporality of social media—posting, waiting, posting, waiting. But I also argue that social media creates a gap around itself; that is, part of the experience of social media is the experience of this gap, a distance instantiated between one's perception while online and the not–social media world (that which Cornell tellingly calls retreat). Plato's argument is that human beings remain enthralled by the transient, material world when we should use logic and analysis to contemplate the perfect eternal world.

However, this eternal world is also, as imagined by Plato, *material*. It is not an ethereal realm of thought but rather a physically real place that can be accessed through disciplined use of the mind's so-called higher faculties: analysis, logic, contemplation. Is the temporal gap I am positing between social media and that which Cornell calls the retreat of the material world (or as Jean Baudrillard puts it, "the desert of the real"[47]), a rehashing of Plato's theory of the cave in the sense of being a wholesale rejection of mimesis?

Susan Sontag, famously, uses this analogy of Plato's cave to critique photography, in *On Photography*.[48] How is social media different from the photography of Sontag's critique? In its accretive and acquisitive temporality, social media does not simply exist in the same room as its practitioners, it insists on their endless participation. I grew up in houses where photographs were physical objects. No one in my family was keen on photographs; even so, odd snapshots could be found in shoeboxes in the backs of closets. One shoebox cache of images included a photograph of my grandfather as a baby held by his father, who stands next to his father, who stands (incredibly) next to his seated, wizened father. One viewed images, rarely, and then the shoebox was set back in its dark corner and left alone. Social media, by contrast, demands constant obeisance; it demands time of its users. In return, it rarely offers them such radical pasts as the still photograph I've described previously, a grandfather

born in 1912 surrounded by all his namesakes including the eldest paterfamilias who in 1912 would have been maybe 80 years old, his own birth then narrowly preceding photography's inception. Unlike Sontag, I am not making an argument about value—and certainly not about truth. I am making an argument about time. Social media practice instates a temporal gap around itself, as the practitioner is enjoined to never turn away from social media. A gated temporality, social media's temporal episteme is entrenched in capitalist discourse.

There Is No Outside the "Selfie"

Jacques Derrida's essential statement of deconstruction—there is nothing outside the text—contends that no reading system positions us outside the text that we are in process of reading.[49] Whatever external viewpoint we establish is illusory. The text deconstructs to yield its meaning. That said, intertextuality becomes a way for interpretive interruptions to move into the text as if invited. If the text is composed implicitly of other texts that it references, then the perspective of intertextuality does not so much open as broaden the text and does not introduce an "outside" but a complicated inside.[50]

While not wanting to deconstruct the selfie, I do want to introduce the idea that the selfie is without an outside; in the discourse of the selfie, there is nothing outside the selfie. The selfie communicates only with its own presence or between selfies. If you remove the selfie from its environment of social media it loses meaning as a selfie and may confront you with an aesthetic not unlike that of a discarded candy wrapper—gesturing toward something attractive and appealing but revealed as detritus, its meaning that of past consumption. The selfie is exchange value: its value is through exchange. Although it is tempting to interpret the selfie as a serial form, seriality is too narrow a frame for the selfie.

This cultural discourse by which the word *sharing* masks transactional exchanges via social media takes a word indicating reciprocity and a gift economy (bearing echoes of late 20th-century nursery school and kindergarten culture, *shares with others*) and places it across a capitalist frame of social media platforms that, regardless of how they are used and who uses them, are profit engines for the social media companies. Mark Zuckerberg, founder of Facebook and owner of Facebook and Instagram, was the youngest self-made billionaire in history for 11 years until Kylie Jenner took that honor from him late in 2019. Both made their millions entirely through social media. Making money through social media, clearly, can occur at a fast rate (though most users involved in social media practice earn no money from it). The wealth that accrues from social media can be so fast because it garners nullity. Nothing is invented or delivered. Social media is simply the harnessing of exchange value without use value.

When I made this argument at a conference, a discussant mentioned that social media could provide a platform for civil discourse in a civil society. Certainly there are examples of youth protests—for example, in Hong Kong in autumn 2019—that make the attempt to harness social media so as to agitate for democratic reform. And, as I discuss at the close of this introduction, the summer 2020 protests in the wake of the barbaric killing of George Floyd were organized through social media. And yet, the very posts that the young protestors in Hong Kong used on social media appeared to feed into a terrifyingly draconian crackdown on their protest, with social media

adding to their surveillance rather than acting as a platform for democratic articulation. Protesters for police reform in the United States in summer 2020 were met with rubber bullets and tear gas and were abducted by paramilitary forces. Such outrageous acts of violence, stemming from police and the federal government, represent conservative cultures abetted by online interactions.

Along these lines, one notes that facial recognition technology in the hands of law enforcement exemplifies how the so-called sharing economy of selfies is too shallow to sustain civil discourse. As fast as I can share my selfie, with some truly heartfelt post, even faster can a dictatorial government make use of my image to monitor my political statements and bring its effect to bear on my body.

Ghosts in the Social Media Machine

On May 25, 2020, George Floyd, a 46-year-old Black man, was murdered in Minneapolis, Minnesota; an on-duty white police officer, Derek Chauvin, was charged with second-degree murder and second-degree manslaughter.[51] The murder was publicly exposed because a 17-year-old girl videotaped the killing and posted the video to her social media page. Mass protests ensued, across the United States and in other nations, against this unjustifiable and barbaric killing and against police brutality and racist terrorism generally. These protests were for the most part organized via social media. The protestors and mourners often displayed images based on a selfie that Floyd had taken months before he was killed. This selfie image haunts America: an image of a man in casual self-regard, looking neither afraid nor especially happy, a photograph he took of himself with his phone likely for no particular reason, just the way people take selfies these days, by habit. This image of Floyd has become an iconic image, the most serious and poignant face of our time. As I write, in June 2020, it may be the most-seen selfie in the world. And yet, the versions of this selfie that are widely disseminated are paintings and other media renderings based on the digitized photographic image. What does the force of this selfie tell us about selfies?

At the outset, the role that social media and Floyd's selfie have played in fomenting protests against not only the brutal killing of Floyd but also racist terrorism—that white America practices through the henchmen of police forces—makes clear an aspect of social media, and of selfie practice, that my book mostly eschews. This book, on the selfie and temporality, was already drafted (though not yet edited) before Floyd's tragic murder. Hence, I turn to the role of Floyd's selfie with a double sense of haunting. The book I had already written, with its arguments that question and critique selfie practice and social media are sound, I do not recant. Yet, I cannot ignore what the epiphenomena that followed Floyd's grievous death tell us about social media and selfie practice. This brief section, then, is not a palinode, but another way of viewing the selfie and time, from another angle, that of grief.

Floyd was not murdered by a rogue cop acting alone. Floyd was killed by a system that holds deep bias against African American people in general and views African American men in particular as fair targets for violence.[52] One considers, then, not only how social media reacted *after* Floyd was killed but also how social media may have interfaced with the larger social system that set the stage for him to be killed.[53] While social media played a critical role in exposing the crime that killed Floyd and in salvaging meaning from Floyd's horrific and unjust death, and while social media as the circulator of the video of his killing became a way to exert protests for justice

and change, it is worth contemplating the effect of social media *before* Floyd was murdered. Specific social conditions could give police officers a sense that they could kill Floyd with impunity, that they could do it because they felt like it, and that they could kill without worry about being punished for excessive force. Floyd was viciously choked to death for the apparent reason that he attempted to pay for cigarettes with a $20 bill that he may not have realized was possibly counterfeit.

Social media creates microclimates of insular social worlds: Facebook, in particular, has come to be seen as a mechanism for circulating right-wing bias.[54] The 12,000 police departments across the United States tend to skew toward the right or conservative wing of American politics, despite the status of police officers as working-class Americans; Facebook's algorithms clearly play a role in fomenting right-wing ideology.[55] Catharine MacKinnon, theorizing violence against women and minorities, develops the idea of a hostile environment as that which encompasses and permits physical violations.[56] The climate of a social world determines what kind of violence, and against whom, it will tolerate. The social climate from which this murderous act emerged in Minneapolis, although different from earlier social nexuses of racism, is not to be radically and unconditionally distinguished from the social climate from which earlier lynchings emerged in the United States.[57] The police officers' social climate is more accurately called a microclimate. This social media–driven fragmenting and dividing of American politics typifies the second decade of the 21st century. Social media's role in feeding and sustaining social microclimates appears to shift geographic microclimates to that of algorithmically controlled, AI-monitored, online communities.[58]

In the southeastern United States of 100 years ago, lynching was common because many Southern whites either participated in or accepted the inevitability of the practice. Lynching was not kept private but was done as a display of force to assert white domination over African Americans. Although lynching was not limited to the American Southeast, it was concentrated in that geographical region for reasons of the history of enslavement, the Civil War, Reconstruction, and Jim Crow in the American Southeast. The region had a micro–social climate within the broader United States, wherein the brutalizing of African American people, including extrajudicial killings, was socially acceptable.[59] Facebook has allowed a somewhat similar, though certainly not identical, micro–social climate to emerge not through geographic region but through networks of so-called *friends* (the term Facebook uses to signify links among platform users). A nexus, then, of right-wing ideology supported by social media. Although one might argue social media is ultimately neutral—it is, as noted, social media that spurred and was used to organize protests against Floyd's killing—I believe that Floyd's closest relatives would disagree. They would likely prefer he were still alive, although the videotape and social media sharing of his death spawned a deeply needed movement protesting racist terrorism.

Because social media platform algorithms feed users what seems to excite them, the platforms thrive on negative and divisive sentiments.[60] In rare instances, that negative intensity can have positive effects. I believe that the ongoing (at the time of my writing) protests against police brutality and racist terrorism are needed and will benefit the United States. But in general, the negative valence of social media algorithms work against de-escalating social and embodied violence.

As data scientist Deborah Hellman argues, "AI and machine learning allow the past to control the future"; that is, existing biases, such as racism, become amplified

through algorithmic feedback structures called machine learning.[61] What effect does this algorithmic gazing have on our sense of self, identity as such, in time? It intensifies feelings of urgency, a mood of not being able to contemplate or think about the larger conditions and consequences of beliefs and actions. It crunches the temporal episteme. But also, in rare cases, it can serve to elongate the temporal episteme through the mechanism of social haunting. Floyd's selfie exemplifies this extensive temporality.

When Floyd took the selfie that became the model for myriad renditions of his face, before millions mourned him after he was killed unjustly, he was an ordinary guy participating in selfie practice. And yet, a certain haunted cast to the image he took precedes Floyd's tragic end. Perhaps the facial expression of seriousness and even sorrow in his selfie is due to his age when taking the photograph and to changes in his life. Floyd was in his mid-40s when he snapped the shot, having overcome an earlier battle with incarceration to find himself as a man of faith, a devout Christian, who worked as a guard protecting troubled souls trying to turn their lives around in a halfway house. He had a young daughter, age 6. He was retrieving himself, saving his soul, as would be the wording of the Christian frame that he had chosen for his turnabout after being incarcerated. He appears in the selfie to be a serious man, a somber man, introspective. His selfie transcends selfie-ness. One sees in the image not a man desiring to create an image for others, but a man recognizing himself, taking his own measure.

I suggest that much of the reason Floyd's selfie has become iconic is its ultimate removal from typical selfie platforms. Rather than circulating on Instagram, Floyd's selfie became the model for wall paintings, cloth paintings, banners, posters. It became the image of the protests, his face floating above the mourners, the protestors, this face *writ large* based on a selfie. The image transcends the small controlled squares of social media displays, because it moved outside them. It is in its afterlife as a commercial and artistic work that Floyd's selfie becomes the icon of our era.

By invoking the term *icon,* I intend both art historian Martin Kemp's theory of iconicity and also the original idea of the icon from Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity.[62] Kemp's argument regarding iconicity derives from observation of formal elements of the image itself. Hence, we can see that Floyd's posture in the selfie conveys seriousness and an apparent lack of posey-ness. It raises the question of whether this image is a selfie or a self-portrait, given that its circulation has not been through traditional selfie mechanisms, and given that the image may not have been created with the traditional selfie impetus—that which Paul Frosh accurately calls the phatic. For Floyd's selfie is not phatic, it is not about immediate touch but about self-recognition. He is neither smiling nor frowning, there is nothing theatrical in his gaze and posture. He seems almost to be foreseeing his own tragic fate: I do not believe he was seeing this, but the seriousness of his expression, the sobriety of the image's simple but forceful composition, and his gray and black sweater all lend to a weighty, contemplative aesthetic in this photo. Kemp rightly argues that iconic images become so because of their aesthetic properties, and we see this in Floyd's iconic selfie.

But Floyd's image is iconic also in the earlier sense of the word *iconic*. In Ethiopian Orthodoxy, a faith founded nearly 2,000 years ago, the icon is holy. It is the holy images of the Mother of God, of Jesus Christ, and of various saints that act as windows to the divinity.[63] The icon is the image-act of the human face as conduit to the divinity. In this sense, an icon is venerated. It is fair to say that Floyd's selfie takes on this double quality of the Orthodox icon, the image that is known to be earthly,

that is, of the stuff of earth, yet is a conduit to the divine. Specifically, the Orthodox icon does not have the sense that Western art has of existing in only one form (an "original" made by an artist). The holy images are rendered in any number of versions by any number of people (though it is a holy act to create such an image, and the faithful believe that God creates the image through the hands of the maker). In Orthodoxy, an icon can be printed on a small piece of laminated paper to keep in one's coat pocket or can be laboriously painted life size on the church iconostasis.

The multiple renderings of Floyd's selfie, painted large or small, follow this version of iconicity: veneration through repetition with difference. Through its transmogrifications, Floyd's image becomes not a selfie but an icon. The circulation of the image matters immensely. If none of the protestors had carried replicas of his face on the streets, if no murals had been painted on city walls, if Floyd's face had not been presented on large wall hangings, if simply Floyd's selfie had been shared on social media and that was it—the selfie's force would have been lessened. In moving beyond the constraints of social media platforms the image expands its aesthetic strength, its capacity to exert political force.[64] As poet Abiodun Oyewole notes, George Floyd was an exemplary image.[65]

By moving outside the screen world of social media—moving into city streets with protestors, into churches with mourners, onto murals with protestors and mourners, moving into the embodied world not controlled by social media platforms—the image of Floyd becomes icon. We dismantle systems of oppression when we instate identity outside those systems. That is what happened (and at the time of my writing is still happening) when mass protests against police brutality and systemic racism emerged in response to Floyd's murder. Those protests used the selfie image of the unjustly killed Floyd as the basis for poster art and murals to bring home the loss of this man, to make us all painfully aware that this was a man, father, son, brother. A human being.

Precisely, this book on the temporality of the selfie argues that selfie practice strips us of our human tie to space-time, to temporal embodiment as episteme, and hence of our human need to stage ways to confront mortal time rather than devise ways to falsify it. At the heart of any temporal episteme is the issue of how we create human community and identity. Time is us, we are made of time. E. P. Thompson's classic work, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," which articulates the epochal shifts in time's episteme with the advent of industrial capitalism, is the tutelary spirit of my exploration of selfie temporality.[66] Deeply entwining capitalism and identity, selfie practice alters our perception of and ideas about time, not through individual images but through reiterative image-making acts. The dream of selfie practice is not the Renaissance inheritance of introspection and self-examination, but rather its rejection, a turn toward a new temporality in which submitting to bureaucratic dispensation of self is experienced as an acceptable loss in exchange for protection from confronting the affect of mortal time.

As the world faces a pandemic that pushes against the stability of late-stage capitalist technological regimes, our faith in our archives, in the sacrosanct power of technological data of our images of ourselves, is tested. The conceit of late-stage capitalist technologies that we—a collective and amorphous *we* woven of the nylon-like, ontological stuff of those who can afford computers, smartphones, or tablets and of those who can afford to spend hours each day using these technologies—articulate ourselves in ways that will be lasting, stored in databases impregnable and

impermeable. We live not so much a Cartesian split from the body as rather a pledge of allegiance to the ability of machine intelligence to preserve the myths of our time in algorithmic code–storing images.

The realization that a pandemic could kill us, despite our continued proximity to machine intelligence—and again here I signify *us* as the well-fed, technology-owning, relatively wealthy—flies in the face of a collective belief in the capacity of computers to preserve us. Selfie practice flourishes through this double-fold, of seeing and not seeing how social media's imbrications into our lives alter our temporal episteme.

Notes

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11 J. M. E. McTaggart, *The Nature of Existence*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1927); J. M. E. McTaggart, "The Unreality of Time," New Series, *Mind* 17, no. 68 (October 1908): 457–74; and Rögnvaldur Ingthorsson, *McTaggart's Paradox* (London: Routledge, 2016).
12 Theodore Sider, *Four-Dimensionalism: An Ontology of Persistence and Time* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); and Dean Zimmerman, "The A-Theory of Time, The B-Theory of Time, and 'Taking Tense Seriously,' " *Dialectica* 59, no. 4 (2005): 401–57.
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that arguments regarding time as a scalar quality used in computational physics fall outside the purview of this book.

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2 The Capitalist Affect

This book limns the temporality of selfie practice. To assess the selfie's differential temporality, one has to push beyond assumed definitions of time, as I've argued in my introduction, to interpret time as an affect.[1] To think of time as an affect is to avow that time is a structure of feeling, a mood that encompasses embodied knowing. Temporal flow and our awareness of it are always personal, imbricated by the mortal pace within which embodied cognition occurs. For this idea of time as affect, I draw from theorists of embodied ontology, of temporality and of affect, to access ways that selfie practice changes and estranges the temporal episteme.

Developing from Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological theories of perception and Rögnvaldur Ingthorsson's revisions of James McTaggart's theory of the paradox of time, I interpret time as that structure of a feeling produced by the experience of change in the material world, with the embodied self as boundary condition of accessing the material world.[2] The tamping of the affect of time is a key aspect of selfie practice.[3] It is what selfie practice sells. Selfie practice is never so singular as in its rescripting of the affect of time. The selfie image, because it is embedded in social media and framed by that embedment, is unlike that of other forms of self-representation, including self-portrait photography, and I locate its crucial difference in its temporal bend.

The affect of time is the temperature of our deep immersion in events, our enveloping sense that events occur in conjunction with our embodied object-status and that some events cause despair or pleasure because they unfold as time.[4] As Merleau-Ponty argues, we do not know from a remote, disinterested position but rather through embodied epistemes, and, because of that embodiment, we feel we have skin in the game, so to speak, as knowledge and experience provoke affect.[5] The affect of time suffuses interpretations of events but does not always accurately reflect events.[6]

If time is an affect then what we mean when we say "time and tide wait for no one" is that an affect of helplessness afflicts us when faced with the pace of the material world. That which cannot be altered because it is already over—that which, because all physical systems move from order to chaos, can never return to its original state—that is the epistemic stuff of time. Social media platforms sell a feeling of control over the affect of time. They do not sell time itself, which can only be coded as sellable, but they very much sell the dream of tamping down or numbing the affect of time.[7] Social media companies sell the experience of feeling as if one were mastering time by participating in selfie practice.

If McTaggart argues that time is an illusion, he does not argue that material change is an illusion, rather that time organizes experience into illusory structures by the illogical pattern of being both the always changing and the never changing.[8] I suggest, developing from Ingthorsson's reenvisioning of McTaggart, that we can see time as the *affect* produced by the epistemic encounter of the law of entropy. The affect of time is melancholic: time, as a lexeme, expresses the impossibility of going back to a previous state. As the saying goes, you cannot step into the same river twice.[9]

Understand that selfies are rivers of images: past selfies are experienced as congealed posts (even selfies that contain movement congeal in those gestures and are circulated in that stasis).They articulate with far greater force than natural memory the arc of McTaggart's argument regarding time's illogic.[10] Whereas in natural memory one often slips between past and present, in selfie practice the line is hard and firm. In selfie-world, the past is immediately set apart as that which was posted a few minutes or more ago.

The eerie simultaneity of flux and irreversibility of what we call events in time is the crux of McTaggart's argument of time's illusory quality. If, when my iPhone clock says it's 7:10 p.m., I leave my house and walk toward the highway, moving with either continuous or discontinuous steps, there is never a point at which my actions are disconnected from each other. And yet, once I arrive at the highway I am clearly no longer in my house, and I will have a sense that time has passed and that something has altered that cannot be put back. My phone says 7:30 p.m., and that number anchors the illusion of controlling time. A positional change has occurred, as I walked, because of change in materiality, shifting muscles and nerves, the stuff of embodiment. While walking, I have never been away from what is happening, and even so what has happened has an ultimate quality of abruptness: all at once, I am not in my house but facing a highway.[11] If I reverse course, I will not return to the identical setting on leaving the house but will reenter a house that is slightly changed, and I myself will be slightly changed. The light will be slightly different. Particulates of dust will have shifted. Lactic acid in my muscles will persist from the walk. Whatever it is, in however many apparently meaningless minutiae, change is the continuous condition of the material world, and we keep our clocks to tell ourselves that we control the conditions of this transience. Selfie practice is a picture clock, soothing us, masking time for us.[12] Unlike photographs, which Roland Barthes calls "clocks for seeing," selfies are clocks to blot out noticing time, to stun the affect of time.[13]

Seeing—as opposed to hearing or touching—physical change in the material world is the clearest marker of that change, especially across large stretches of time. Here, photography intervenes. Seeing a photograph of oneself from 20 years ago, one faces evidence of material change. And yet, without that visual evidence, and with the curve of natural memory and the sense of one's physical body being relatively constant, one knows less clearly just how much time has passed. The curve of natural memory blurs the sense of time passing (in contrast to a digital post). This idea of time as a distance is part of the illusory quality that McTaggart ascribes to time, because the distance is both fixed and fluent. Seeing change is arguably the most forceful experience of knowing that change occurs in the material world. Aging is only one example. Clouds crossing the sky and shifting diurnal light patterns are forms of change that we watch, rather than touch or hear. Time is the name we give to change, time is the affect that runs through all other affects.[14] Selfie practice moves into the space where material change is most personal and obvious marks are made—our faces, our bodies—and

seeks to assuage the fearsomeness of change by making it seem we are in control of those very changes that most intimately beset us.

Because time is an affect that attends entropy, manipulation of that affect can be sold through the intensive immersion in repetition that is social media practice. As itself, the affect of time is often painful. It is almost impossible to be happy while thinking about time. Photography, as Barthes argues in *Camera Lucida*, is about pain, because the punctum, or force, of the photograph is time. Even so, printed photographs as physical objects can be transformational to view because they are themselves vulnerable to time, objects in time.[15] The framed photographs of my child as an infant, in an album, gather dust. They share the fate of all objects that surround us, moving through space according to the inescapable beat of entropy. Even though, yes, they do faithfully represent the baby's face at a time when the boy is beginning to look very much like a man, these images do not mask time. Rather they hold in an eddy of incompletion. As Barthes rightly acknowledges, photographs are time's bruise. The humility of the object before the inescapable force of entropy is occluded and elided in social media selfie practice. This builds an illusory self as if outside time, making the realm of selfie practice addictive and additive.[16]

Capitalist Temporality

Social media's selfie practice goes to the heart of the capitalist ideology of time and sells precisely the illusory balm to the wound of time's affect: endless selfies. Fifty years ago, E. P. Thompson argued that advanced industrial capitalism changes our relationship to time.[17] Because capitalist cycles are driven by the urge to accumulate—objects, experiences, land, whatever is coded as capital—and accumulation is a temporally embedded act, the press of commercial concerns, especially those such as social media platforms that sell only experience, is to create a feeling of mastering time in their purchasers, a feeling of controlling time's ability to negate us.[18] In interpreting selfie practice, I extend Thompson's thesis, unpacking selfie practice as an extension of advanced capitalist habits of conceptualizing time.

As Katharina Pistor makes clear, *selfhood* as we now legally understand it has its origins in capitalist discourse.[19] We view the self as a marketable commodity because of capitalist encoding of time: our embodied temporality is itself coded as a commodity. The selfie-self is the image of a coded legal definition of identity under global capitalism, the production of this coded illusion.[20] Images treated with editing apps, images that are always partly staged (inasmuch as turning the phonecam on oneself is an act of self-staging), selfies are a mask of identity where identity is itself the product marketed. Selfie productivity, conceptually, occurs in capitalist time, not mortal time. Which does not, of course, confer immortality through selfie practice. Rather selfie time is the derivative of the embodied mortal time of the embodied self.[21] Selfie practice continuously rehearses the capitalist urge to "be productive" in a hollow, endlessly repeated structure of producing not what is needed but what can be modeled into what is wanted.[22]

In the temporality created by social media platforms for selfie practice, serialization extends without an end in sight. Through the prize of numerical selfie recognition, social media sells objects, services, experiences, and lives fully enmeshed in advertising. By creating a fully monetized self, selfie practice is poised to sell anything, as influencers do. But what selfie practice really sells is a feeling of control of the painful

affect of time. Here, I am reflecting Barthes's claim that the "punctum" of any photograph is time.[23] Except that, for Barthes, not all photographs have a punctum.[24] And yet all selfies deployed in social media practice market a blunting of the affect of time. Selfies are the antipunctum.

Selfie practice sells a feeling of the easing of the clutch of time. And yet, paradoxically, the selfie-self is almost entirely a self lodged in the past, inasmuch as posts almost immediately become old in social media's incessant new images. The capitalist self of selfie practice is a self *always* being produced, so as to paper over the fault lines of capitalist waste, the way that almost as soon as it's posted the selfie is old. The telos of the selfie, however disavowed by social media publicity, is to be seen by AI in a flume of ever-repeating images, and then, after some quick looks by users, cast into the old and done category to which capitalist productivity ever hurtles. This is the case regardless of what selfie posters believe about the act of posting selfies: the social media platform is run by AI, with selfies seen by algorithmic codes that then feed images to other users. The goal of selfie practice for social media platform companies (as this is their income source) is that every participant is posting frequently enough that there are few gaps in their use. Keeping social media users' eyes never far away, the advertising that pays heavily into the coffers of social media companies fundamentally structures the temporal episteme of selfie practice. Instagram itself becomes a form of advertisement, or self-promotion, for many users. The quotidian temporality, the dailiness, the diurnal, nocturnal act of building this phantasmagorical visual selfie-self militates against confrontation and exploration of the gaps, pain, and fragments that make up identity in mortal time.

The Wound of the Real

"The desert of the real," Baudrillard's memorable phrase describing the world not on our screens, echoes in temporality theory, inasmuch as we may see embodied mortal time as a wound, a source of lack or dearth.[25] The dearth of embodied identity is incessantly covered over by social media selfie practice.[26] To confront that temporal tear that constitutes our identity is the task of the self-portrait, but not of the selfie.[27]

A gap or wound at the core of identity is the cut of time. Time inserts itself, cuts into a continuous self. You are never what you were, as the poet Wallace Stevens states, "You yourself were never quite yourself."[28] You are always moving toward and away from some sense of self, as time breaks apart continuity of perception and action. Time violates us. But time also is the epistemic ground of identity, the only conceptual space of suture (we build ourselves in time and of time). The tegument of pulling together an agentic self across the fault of temporality is also time. Through Marx, we return to the idea of a specter haunting us: the self is haunted by material conditions of the sociohistorical nexus. But the fault line at the center of identity is time. Time resists our agency, the epistemic hollow at the core.

In capitalism, the concept of time is twisted to perform as coconspirator to profit maximization: the idea of maximizing productivity is the dream of controlling time, of sealing the tears and fragments that are time's episteme. The slippage in capitalist productivity, though, is the way that the use and so-called waste of time eludes the production of desired goods. In selfie practice, the waste product is (not directly) pollution. Old selfies are the trash of the internet.

Weberian Time

For Max Weber, Protestantism is the conceptual substructure of capitalism.[29] The Protestant work ethic, contends Weber, stems from a belief in salvation through works, and from Calvinist ideology that interprets a mark of the "elect" or "saved" as those who prosper materially.[30] The idea of endless work as an ethical good, and the concomitant disbelief in the force of ritual, generates paradoxically the covertly ritualistic structures of capitalist temporality (as many forms of what is called *work* in capitalism today are ritual). The system extols the idea of the "use" of time to "produce" that which can be sold, as if time really were money. The idea that time is a substance for our use is just that: an idea, a construct. Capitalist structures codify time as usable substance and stoke fears of time's so-called waste. Capitalist time is never about seeking the essential necessary thing but about creating the illusion of desire for what is *not* needed, because only that can be marketed as endlessly desired.

Abstract Selfie

A core tenet of Marx's theory of societal shifts brought about not *by* but inherently *in* capitalism is the creation of the abstract person.[31] Free labor in capitalism creates bonds that are at once open and constraining, a constraint brought about through and as the abstraction of identity. Facebook and Instagram seem, at first glance, to soften the pain of being an abstract person—someone who is needed not in a socially tethered way by her community but who can come and go and pass through onto something else, constrained only by the need to earn money, that is, to be the abstract person created constitutively in capitalism. But in the context of this abstract person in capitalism, selfie practice reifies rather than breaks down the abstraction of identity.

Consider: Facebook and Instagram, through their mobilization of selfie practice, cover and elide the exchange between social media companies and those who buy data from them for advertising, a monetary exchange that replaces the older exchange between laborer and bourgeoisie, between explicit buyer and seller (as in a bricks-and-mortar store). Indeed, selfie practice thrives by hiding rather than vivifying the abstract person. But hiding is not the same as deconstructing. Selfie practice is deep anchorage for capitalism's abstract person, maintaining and extending the erosion of identity into abstraction.

Imagine, before the advent of social media, at the end of the 20th century you go to the grocery store to buy bread. Your place in that store is that of the abstract person that Marx describes: you have freedom to buy anything in the store, as long as you have the money; and you have the money insofar as you have submitted exertion of effort to the earning of a wage as proletariat or through the manipulation of capital as a bourgeois. You exist in the store's system of accounting only by this number: the amount of money you spend. It doesn't matter to the store's core system, its profit margin, whether you are friends with several other people in the store or a stranger to everyone there, devoutly religious or a sybarite. You cannot help but be aware of this fact, that even if the clerk is friendly and you share a friendly conversation with him, you and he remain abstract persons vis-à-vis the system of exchange that is the reason for the store.[32] You bring money, he receives the money. The money goes to the corporation and particularly the CEOs who own the stores. You and the clerk are under no illusions as to this fact, even as some aspects of the store visit exceed or elude the

capitalist frame, such as maybe you run into an old friend and have a conversation. Even so, it is not hidden from you that you are an abstract person in the core act of buying.[33]

Facebook and Instagram operate just as the grocery store of 1999 did; they are capitalist enterprises earning money for themselves and with no other goal than profit. However, you the customer are obfuscated of the exchange taking place, in the context of social media.[34] The exchange, with social media, is between the social media company that owns the platform and the advertisers who pay large sums for the data—about social media users—that the companies reap by tracking your every gesture on social media. Each time you post a selfie and respond to a friend's post, you are not paying Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg directly as you would pay for a loaf of bread. Rather, here—as a set of data—*you are the loaf of bread* that he sells.[35] Social media is a site of capitalist exchange. It is just that users of social media are often not privy to the explicit exchange. Precisely, the mask of selfies on Facebook and Instagram functions to hide and obfuscate the exchange—between consumer as saleable data and product advertiser—that makes social media platforms capitalist performances of the abstract self par excellence. It is as if social media users instinctively feel their abstract personage status as a pang that social media covers but can never absolve because the system is run precisely *on* the structure of the abstract self. Social media can never admit any form of identity other than the abstract self or the inherently capitalist structure of its platforms would collapse.

As Derek Sayer makes clear, the creation of an elided differential (hierarchical covered with the myth of equality) sociality is not a side effect of capitalism but the nature of capitalism as such.[36] The abstract person does not stem from capitalism but rather is the core integer of the functioning of capitalism. Being in time in capitalism means being abstracted in relation to the temporal episteme. In capitalist code, it is one's time that is sold, one's time that is billed, one's time that is endlessly called upon to *produce oneself*.

Selfie practice eerily conjures this abstract self as endlessly productive, constitutively temporally marked: the selfie is the self producing itself as a self-image. And nothing else. Rather than a laborer hired to spend 40 hours per week installing widgets, or a lawyer billing $500 per hour, or a CEO millionaire who "has no free time"—that is, no time to spare for those who are not useful to her business—the selfie practitioner is enjoined to posit time as the production of self. The selfie is a capitalist self produced as reified time.

The selfie-self, as a hyperextension of the capitalist self, rehearses the self in capitalism without substantive vestige of earlier systems. In selfie practice, the abstract self does not meaningfully co-occur with the self that is, say, versed in tort law, or educated in the patterns of the market, or skilled in inserting widgets. Instead, in selfie practice, the capitalist abstract self is all there is, evacuated of knowledge, and this selfie-self is presented as endlessly productive. Take a selfie of yourself every day or even more frequently. Take a selfie of yourself every hour. Never stop. Never stop being *productive*. Your product is yourself, as image, and it is endlessly offered, posted online. The idea that selfie practice is *productive* seems almost absurd, inasmuch as the only product of selfie practice is a numberless sequelae of similar images of people striving to look similar to an abstract person—as I discuss in chapters 6 and 7, "cyborg face" is a literalization of the face of the abstract person. This productivity of selfie taking makes selfie practice the empty epitome of the capitalist abstract self,

an endless scene of production without content. For the valorization of productivity without questioning the value of what is produced is at the core of capitalist identity formation and the circulation of capital as such.

Self on the Shelf

Before the advent of social media, having an identity in capitalism meant being someone who shopped and labored, labored and shopped. Or, in rarer cases, it meant having an identity as one owning the means of production.[37] This capitalist conceptualization of identity embedded in the market is imaged in social media practice, and through this imaging of identity—selfie practice—the experience of time is altered. Before the advent of social media, there were significant temporal stretches and material spaces that did not foment the expression of self as shopper or laborer, times when one was neither getting nor spending.[38] But this capitalist structure is at once suppressed and intensified in social media practice, wherein practitioners are always already both shopper and laborer without ceasing.

Before Amazon and Instagram, even those with a great deal of money wouldn't shop literally everywhere all the time. So, before social media, shopping as a mark of identity in capitalism was erosive but also inherently limited. You were not *always* in a store, always buying. The gaps of time during which you could not buy were often frames that slipped somewhat to the margins of, or even outside, capitalism. But selfie practice fosters a self always already immersed within capitalist time, that is, the time of buying or wanting to buy, selling or trying to sell.

In selfie practice, you post, and you are using a platform intrinsically commercial, a seamless capitalist structure girding, guiding, and limiting your actions. Regardless of its users' individual beliefs, a social media platform is a capitalist mechanism. You post selfies, you see others' posts of selfies, a deep steep in advertising. You are laboring, by using social media, to produce data for social media companies.[39] Rather than intermittently shopping a few times a week at physical stores, most social media users are constantly *connected*—the euphemism that makes social media sound like a network rather than a store. Users are constantly immersed in the capitalist sphere and drawn into the practice of self through the capitalist sphere of social media. The self, through selfie practice, is transmogrified into a continuously capitalist set of acts, or series of posts, the incompletion of identity as the self-product. Not in the brutal unchosen way of enslavement but in an eerily *chosen* way, the selfie-self is the self made into a product eagerly and without physical coercion.

Girls Talk

To market the idea of a self is the mark of selfie practice. By the numbers, it is often a female and feminine act of appearance, though profits from selfie practice devolve mostly toward companies headed by men.[40] And the selfie-selves of feminine people, cisgender women and trans women, are often consumed by masculine people, often cis men.[41] In other words, this new capitalist self—the selfie-self—is tailored to match older and oppressive gender codes, by which those who are feminine market themselves, as an image, to those who are masculine. It is an imagistically literalized version of Claude Lévi-Strauss's seminal and offensive theory that culture is created through the exchange of women, the "goods" that go to market. Lévi-Strauss, rather than

creating a structural argument that is an observation about human culture as such, instead pinpoints precisely the gendered injustices of capitalist exchange.[42] That it is a system by which people are turned into products, and the less powerful the person (such as women under patriarchal oppression) the more of a product she becomes.

As Chris Hedges notes, "The violence and commodification of human beings for profit are the quintessential expressions of global capitalism."[43] The selfie-self is the most ingenious mode to date by which capitalism creates identity that is not just intermittently but *always* profit driven, even as most users do not feel that they are participating in a system of profits when they post selfies. Social media practice depends on a power imbalance between those who use social media and those who create and control it. Selfie exchange is not fundamentally a form of dialogue.[44] Rather selfies are for show, presentation.[45] The for-profit self is the selfie-self, even as few selfie practitioners view themselves as being immersed in capitalist programmatics and propaganda.

Within the intersecting folds of social media platforms, the time of the self is fragmented but also sealed, like a partly shattered insect in amber. The matrix of hypervisibility is the social space of selfie practice. This social space is created by and in turn adheres to capitalist dictates of temporality. Argues Pistor, "In fact capital has never been about a *thing* but always about its legal coding; never just about output and input but always about the ability to monetize expected returns."[46] As Pistor contends, capital is not an object, nor either an act or even a status, but a *codification*, a classification. Selfie practice is the image of precisely this code: it gives its posters and viewers nothing but the idea of getting something that in turn becomes capital, though the money flows to social media companies from the labor of social media users, rather than accruing to selfie practitioners. Although a few influencers have become very wealthy through their selfie practice, for the most part the wealth generated by social media accrues to social media platform company executives.[47] It is they who have the means of production, the ability to set the code for the creation and circulation of self-surveillance, that is, the collective self-surveillance of creating and posting images of oneself.[48]

Derivative Self

Selfie practice is a visual analogy of derivative economics. It takes something that has real value, a human being, and creates a relatively worthless derivative—endless successions of often uninspired photographs of that person—image practices that themselves generate income for social media companies. Rather than the person's actions or creations outside the realm of photographing herself and posting those images, selfies are considered valuable in social media for their accrual of grabs, likes, and shares within that system. Participating in social media, of course, is itself a form of labor, if few participants view it as such.[49] But that labor creates derivative selves, *selfies*, that have a parallel relationship to identity as do derivatives, in commerce, to concrete forms of capital.[50]

The time of the selfie is a derivative temporality. The experience of time adheres to subjectivity, in selfie practice, not through agency of the embodied mortal self that can act according to something tangentially akin to will; instead the selfie-self is conceived as a function of capital, self as an endlessly processual product. It is the blurring and eliding of the affect of time, played out through self-created images of one's own face and body, that selfie practice on social media sells.

The selfie-self rehearses being seen in the act of being seen.[51] I suggest, then, a parallel between the selfie's derivative value, a derivative that is on the living human who creates the images, and derivatives in financial practices. In financial trades, a derivative has no intrinsic value as such. It is a creation of capitalist code that has only perceived value, although its perceived value circulates in capitalism becoming manifest wealth for those who manipulate the code and own the means of the code's (symbolic) production. Likewise, a selfie is very close to nothing at all, a set of coded digital data. The selfie's time is experientially uncoupled from mortal embodied time, just as derivatives are uncoupled from materials (like land or buildings) of actual value. The point of capitalism is to sell less for more; the point of selfie capitalism is to sell a slice of self, a diminutive screen image, for a feeling of mattering in time. Social media, though it trucks in images of bodies rather than actual bodies, is more effective, arguably, at controlling the movement of real bodies than any previous capitalist mechanism. It trucks in code without material goods, but rather with material substrate (iPhones, tablets, and the like).[52]

Fusion of the commercial with personal and familial in the capitalist frame of social media selfie practice goes deep. To understand how this happens, it is critical to think back through the temporality of capitalism. Late capitalism is a reenvisioning of the meaning and force of time. It is its own temporal credence. The belief system of late capitalism is deeply invested in altering what functions perceptually as the mortal pace of time. I define late capitalism here drawing from Michel Foucault, Thomas Piketty, and Bruno Latour, who interpret our late 20th-century and early 21st-century developed world through a critical analytical paradigm that resists the ideology of a self-congratulatory frame of "Modern" progress.

To say there is a link between 21st-century capitalism and social media is like saying there is a link between language and words. Social media is the purest form of capitalism yet imagined, exchange value stripped of use value. Consider, if I buy a car I am not merely and only buying an illusion. Yes, advertisements for automobiles trade on illusion: they rarely if ever show pollution, gridlock, or fatal accidents. They show escape from the very conditions that automobiles create; in a sinister twist, the car is advertised as the mechanism by which the 21st-century citizen transcends the trap of capitalism, that is, moves beyond congested urban streets, mind-numbingly dull suburbs, and factories that create cars and polluted air and water.

But despite the magic of advertising as a false-front, a car is not merely and purely exchange value. I buy a car and drive it to work. Drive it to see my mother in Georgia. That leaves aside the questions of why work is too far away to walk to and why I live so far from my mother. Those realities are also part of capitalism. But unlike the car, or any other material product, social media is purely capitalism without any other function of any kind. It is a commercial without a product. Social media via platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube differ from email, Zoom, and Skype because of the latter's relatively limited capacity to be mass shared and recirculated. Social media creates a troubled oneiric space wherein the watcher and the watched merge in an unending twist of withheld consummation. Because the pleasure of social media is the pleasure of waiting for what you don't ever fully get. In this sense, it is an ideal capitalist product.

If I can convince billions of people to buy a useless product that I put virtually no effort into creating, I am an enormously successful capitalist (maybe a social media mogul). If I create something that people desperately need, say, clean water, a product

that takes all my time and energy to create, and if I sell it cheap because people need clean water, then I am an abject failure as a capitalist.

Søren Kierkegaard notes that "life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards," and selfie practice offers a brilliantly vacuous solution to this temporal trap.[53] A student described looking at selfies she took as a 10-year-old child; selfie practice reassures her that the child she once was is held by social media, somehow still present, though she is in her twenties. The backward and forward temporality of selfie practice is a capitalist lure.

Keep Circling

The dearth and scarcity that are inherent to mortal time, capitalist ideologies of time elide, by deploying the metaphor of the endless circulation of capital.[54] Selfie practice puts the "circulation" of self, self-image, and selfie in the place of capital for users—for the owners of social media platforms, they accrue traditional capital, as these people are wealthy in very traditional ways, owning large expanses of material property and goods, as well as assets—but the endless circulation of the image of the self, in social media, mimics the capitalist dream of drowning mortal time in "circulation" of money. Selfie time is capitalist time, to the hilt. The goal of circulation in capitalism is itself ultimately a longing to rewrite the temporal episteme, with an abstract notion of circulation of goods as antidote to mortal temporality.

To say that selfie time is capitalist time is to make several points. Selfie time is conceived of as time that must be "productive" and yet not be considered work; time that must be focused on reiterative desire, proffering that which is to be consumed over and over; time that is necessarily cordoned and placed in eminently consumable packaging; time that flows with material desire but does not satisfy desire (an endless return to the product is part of the product); exchanged time but never useful time.

Selfie time is temporality caught in the thrall of capitalist codes. The *product* of social media is nothing but corralling numerical groups: the mathematical sublime is the sublime of social media—number of likes, number of shares, number of posts. Exchange value as the act of exchange or transaction sustains selfie practice. If we understand time as a variable coordinate, the selfie-self plots its temporality along the axis of capitalist success as numerical success. Time is itself an abstraction, a coordinate, of nonreversible change in materiality.[55] This abstraction merges with the abstract self of capitalism in selfie practice. In selfie practice, the softly imprisoning force of capitalist temporality merges with the notion of identity.

Participating in selfie practice, I am not inserted into capitalist time, I *become* capitalist time. Capitalist time becomes my identity. Because space-time is a quality that coheres, selfie practice's abstraction of spatial episteme rehearses a closure of space in favor of abstract time. Abstract time is an extension of abstract self.

Selfie time as the product of capitalist time, then, depends on each selfie image's inability to satisfy: you have to keep coming back for more. The temporal frame for capitalism is "productive" time, but what is ideally produced is the illusion of satiety, because real satiety would mean the customer doesn't keep coming back. Consider Amazon, the brainchild of Jeff Bezos. At the time of my writing, its founder and owner is among the richest individuals in the world because he has created a system for mobilizing desire. He has not written books but instead has reconceptualized books as objects that can be more easily transported than other objects because of

their relatively standard size. Through this insight, Bezos has harnessed circulation reified, the circulation of desire only as desire. Amazon depends on images to mobilize desire, using an online system of selling, but what Amazon sells is unappeased desire, unappeased because that object that is not in one's home appears magically on the screen with a quick tap and is promised by Amazon in "one click." Once your package arrives, it's not enough—because the image is always there ready to supplant the object. Or to put it another way, through online commerce, the promise of desire is always there ready to supplant what poet Philip Larkin (in a different context to be sure) called the "fulfillment's desolate attic."[56]

Amazon, although not technically a social media platform, functions like one, selling image, desire, and circulation. Its time, then, is of a constantly foreshortened future in which all that shapes meaning is the arrival of the next parcel that in turn never satisfies. In this frame, temporality cannot extend meaningfully behind or ahead but only in small bursts of recent and just ahead packages. Notably, Amazon uses Prime Student Brand Ambassadors, college students, to post selfies of themselves using Prime products as one of the key arms of its advertising. Amazon Prime Student Campus Managers merge social media and Amazon by shaping the identity of the very young.

This capitalist urge to *use time* so as to produce a product, selfie practice observes as dictate. You can be numerically successful on social media only if you post frequently and respond to other posts. The cycle is never turned off; you might sleep but you sleep knowing that social media does not sleep.[57] Somewhere the screen is always on. And that screen is the anchorage of identity in selfie practice. The abstract selfie-self is time management construed as identity. Various markers of identity that pull from outside capitalism can mask the selfie as something other than a mark of capitalist time, but selfie's futurity and its past are null. Selfie practice in social media is not a building that creates substantive meaning across time, instead the selfie-self is a temporal house of cards.

The Image of Transport

Selfie practice is built of images, and images have key differences from bodies. Images of human beings can face time differently than can living bodies.[58] *La Giaconda*, after restoration, looks much the same in lineament as she did when Leonardo da Vinci painted her. The inevitability of material change in appearance appears to pause somewhat around the material image, as such. In particular, the image of the human face represents an idea of stasis.[59] It is not real stasis, but the appearance of it. Selfie practice takes the capitalist premise of selling the numbing of time, time as the affect that contains other affects, and makes it an experience that users come to believe they *need*: they need this feeling of controlling time's affect. Think of selfie practice as transportation of the self through small parcels of time (the dailiness of selfie practice). Each selfie is an image of self with a very scant chance of surviving in any meaningful sense beyond the moment of viewing (yes, social media companies may save data, but that's in their control and the hypervolume of images effectively renders invisible most past images). Even so, each selfie shows itself as an image of the self, with the capacity of all images to supersede the temporal change of the embodied self. In this sense, selfie practice is not really a manifestation of self-portraiture but instead a mode of self-transportation across time.

Consider the transportation industry, in its relationship to capitalism, as it was prepandemic and is likely to become again postpandemic. If I take a plane from Chicago, I will be enmeshed in capitalist time for a stretch. My body will be transmogrified into a product that the transportation industry delivers from point A to point B. Time will be uncomfortably constrained but also soothingly controlled: my flight to Cincinnati will be much easier and quicker than if I had to walk. As I fly, I am entirely held in the capitalist structures of the transportation industry. But then I will walk out of the airport and find my way to a physical place that likely does not fully and completely enmesh my body in capitalism's ontology. A house or an apartment, of course, is paid for through mortgage or rent, but once I'm inside I can pay attention to other aspects of embodiment than those that arrive via purchase. A temporal pool of noncapitalist stasis eddies in the spaces for which we have already paid, provided that said space is also one the attendance of which capitalist procedures can momentarily leave alone (once you're alone).

In selfie practice, however, you never escape the selling of the affect of time. You are never alone. Your trip is never over. You cannot sit quietly and think while also participating in social media; platforms are designed to draw you to endlessly participate, posting and responding. If you wish to think, your only choice is to step away from social media, for in social media selfie-self time is all encompassing. The flight of selfie practice—the transportation of image that is social media platform's act—is never over. There is no time at which the body, taken up in selfie practice as image, can disembark and become something other than a continuously nudged forward product of capital.

Getting and Spending

The temporality of the selfie as a manifest expression and experience of capitalist structures of identity also reflects the inculcation of earning and spending acts. Capitalist activity for those who are *not* the wealthiest of the wealthy (not the one percent, shall we say) but who have some spending power is made up of earning salary, paying bills, buying essential items, and spending at one's discretion. Hence, the experience of identity in capitalist discourse is temporally fragmentary for most people. There is a time when salary is dispensed (bimonthly), a time when bills are paid (monthly), and, most pertinent to the idea of pleasure in capitalism, several fragmentary moments when purchasing occurs. In the instant that I buy new shoes I am more powerful, in capitalist discourse, than in my mid-level job. In the instant when I buy new shoes, I am *waited on* by a clerk and the moment of giving money is the moment when I feed my blood (money) to the lifeblood of whatever billionaire is on the receiving end of whatever store I patronize. In this moment, I infuse the billionaire owner (of whatever company makes the shoes) with my own capitalist lifeblood.

Shift this quaint scenario of instore purchase to the way we mostly shop today: Amazon. Making ever-more uncanny the magical realism of capitalism, Bezos has become staggeringly wealthy by gathering precisely this addictive fragmenting pulse of small purchases in capitalist time. During the pandemic, Bezos's wealth rose in inverse proportion to the suffering of America. The worse the pandemic got, the richer he became.

Each time I order from Amazon, my purchase, however small and meager, adds to Bezos's wealth, as do the billions of other purchases that Amazon corrals. It is

in this moment of making the small purchase that I leverage the power of the only identity that matters in capitalist discourse, the power of purchase. I may not have the bourgeois wealth of owning the means to the production of capital, but I have the middle-class wealth of being able to buy small items, and have them delivered by those with less money than I. Only in those moments of buying am I *seen* by capitalist discourse. Though adding only in small ways to Bezos's wealth, I am essential in the fragmented way that all of the small bites of self that are selfies are essential to Zuckerberg's kingdom of Facebook and Instagram. We give them what they need to be multibillionaires through our solicitous deployment of small moments of transient power: the purchase, the post.

Selfie practice extends from the paradigm of capitalist discourse that preceded social media platforms and that yet is essential for social media platforms. The self comprising fragmented moments of small power through capitalism are the selfie-self. When I post a selfie, I am momentarily *seen*: the system of Instagram or Facebook takes me in, absorbs me. In posting selfies, I'm effectively giving money and power to Zuckerberg, but it doesn't feel that way.

It feels as if, in the moment of the post, *I* am powerful, visible, seen, and articulated as a *self*. My selfie identity, in this way, is the twin of my earlier purchasing identity. (Previously, I reference the time before Amazon when I might have presented myself as a face and body in a store.) Through the selfie, I instantaneously and temporarily become a "self" in the only space capitalism has for me, as a middle-class subject: someone who adds to the wealth of the very wealthiest.

Selfie practice follows a curve wherein the selfie practitioner must have some small access to specific aspects of capitalism: a phonecam, time for posing and posting, relative control over a place (or places) from which to post, and a lifestyle that the poster feels shows sufficient wealth so those who see the post will be impressed. If I am homeless and cannot afford daily food, I likely am not posting selfies on social media. But the amount of capital necessary to participate in selfie practice, just like the amount of capital necessary to make small purchases from Amazon, is fairly small.

Selfie practice facilitates the manifestation of a self against a backdrop of relative inconsequentiality in capitalist discourse—in that in global capitalism most of us are without consequence, having little money relatively speaking. But each time we are able to make a purchase, however small, and each time we are able to post a selfie and social media absorbs our selfie-self, we feel we matter. In these moments, capitalist time "counts" us.

What actually happens is that we matter in these moments in the specific sense that the wealthy accumulate their massive wealth through our small purchases and our individual gestures of selfie posting, that is, social media participation. Social media cannot accumulate its massive wealth for its companies' CEOs without our labor of participation. In this temporal sense, the selfie as identity is formed in contrast to other, earlier capitalist temporalities.

Thus, selfie practice is a fuller manifestation of the fragmented temporality of late capitalist identity. Just as I might feel myself visible when I present myself at a store to buy, so also in posting a selfie in that brief moment I am visible and the social media platform needs me and receives me. My visibility is transient in a profound and irremediable way. I exist, as an identity, within the capitalist system only in these fragmented moments of mattering to that system: when I buy, when I post.

Social media maps the temporality of capitalist identity onto digitized photographically based images. In social media I matter; the system needs me, but only when I post and comment. Otherwise, I may as well not exist for that system, and in that specific nonmattering sense, my identity occurs not continuously but fragmentarily in selfie practice. Of course, I probably have followers and friends who would care if I vanished or died, people who know me in embodied time, but they are *extrinsic* to social media in its essence. In its essence, social media exists only through the staccato rise and dip of post and comment. Even as these fragments remain embedded in the context of data saved, their epistemic temporality is without continuity. Even were I to take and post videos of myself *unceasingly*, the temporality of the fragment would manifest in the gap between my post and the post's reception and commentary. And in any case this point of the self being endlessly video-recorded and livestreamed is almost certainly moot. The production of such a gesture would constitute a kind of psychosis, inasmuch as it would necessitate complete separation from embodied self.[60]

Exchanging Myself

The exchange value of the shoes I might buy includes this always fragmenting moment of creating myself as an identity in capitalism. There is status in wearing new shoes (as opposed to the poorest of the poor without intact shoes), but there is also a use value to shoes. What if we could remove use value entirely from the equation? What if we could create that fragmentary moment of gaining identity in capitalism without selling anything useful in any way? That is, create pure capitalist identity moments without any exchange of physical goods? This would be massively lucrative for those controlling the terms of the exchange and would also seem magical to the buyer who would feel she was not buying anything but rather only instating herself as an identity by participating.

What I have described here is the selfie in social media. Nothing is *needful* here—one can communicate expeditiously in other ways. The engine is not only driven by exchange, it is driven by exchange without use. And as such the identity-in-temporality of social media selfie practice is drawn from other earlier forms of capitalism and also exaggerates them. Whether the selfie-self is presented in overt capitalist mode by an individual participant in social media, the temporality of identity in selfie practice is an extended or exaggerated manifestation of capitalist identity: percussive events of identity as opposed to identity created through ascesis. Exchange value, ultimately, differs from fair exchange. It is a performance mimicking exchange, driving profit.

The magical moment—*the table dancing*—of being instantiated, having an identity in capitalism, through selfie practice is not Marx's "all that is solid melts into air," for here there is nothing solid to begin with.[61] Rather it is all that is air melts into ether. Or rather into the always in-between, interim, temporal phase that is social media. In selfie practice, the moment of the self being seen, given an identity, in capitalist discourse is stripped of use value and so the pleasure is untrammeled by usefulness. I show you mine, you show me yours. However, this exchange, importantly, is really *not* between you and me. The exchange is between social media companies (that earn money by corralling and controlling the exchange of image and commentary) and advertisers. The temporality of the selfie is capitalist temporality fastened onto images of our faces as transient and also immovable masks: selfies.

Weber Rides Again

Weber's argument that capitalism stems from Protestantism itself reflects deeply embedded beliefs about temporality and about pacing one's actions and reactions to events in the material world, that is, a concept of time as that which is one's possession as if it were a material object to be owned like anything else in capitalist code. Coding time as a usable material object is a mythical ideational structure.

Time is not our possession, nor an object in itself, but rather the medium in which we commit our mortal acts in the world of objects. As Pistor rightly contends, capital is not a given but a code, that which we call wealth is a code of power structures.[62] These structures are clandestinely enforced—argue Pierre Bourdieu and Frantz Fanon—by blunt physical violence, historically. For Bourdieu and Fanon, that which asserts itself as the surface given of power, that is, the coded structure that asserts its unquestioned and unquestionable right of domination and dominion, reaches back to historical use of blunt physical violence and encodes always within it the threat of violence.[63] The colonialist time that is critiqued in indigenous American photographer Shelley Niro's (whose self-portrait work is discussed in chapters five and eight of this book) personal and tribal history, her ancestral history as Bay of Quinte Mohawk, emerges from capitalist time or with the concept of time as that which can be sold. When Marx argues that all the proletariat has to sell is his body's labor, he also implicitly acknowledges capitalism as encoding time as that which we sell, our bodies' actions across time. Billable hours are a capitalist construct, and time as that which is sold undergirds in a far-reaching way the code of capital.

The selfie sells time or rather the self *becomes* capitalist time in the selfie, postable, a manifestation of the image of the self as an extrapolation of the punch-the-clock factory work pattern. The self-as-clock, the self transmogrified into capitalist time, as that which is sold as a clock, is the structure of selfie practice on social media (and, again, I define selfie practice as limited to social media, as self-images created outside the discourse of social media are something else, not selfies). Self-portraiture does not necessarily and in all cases buy into the belief structure of a self composed of sellable time. But selfie practice must because of its inextricable frame within social media practice, platforms, and ultimately social media companies, the capitalist temporal stamps that run all social media posts. The punch-the-clock self is the selfie-self, in the time of capitalist "work." Hour by hour, image by image, workday by workday online in social media.

Weberian time, reading capitalist time as Protestant engendered, interprets actions that result in some sellable product as so-called work, driven by a work ethic. But the episteme of time could take many other forms: time could be understood as best filled with meditation, the ideal of the spiritual athlete of Eastern Christianity, or as a wheel, time that does not produce sellable products but instead disciplines the practitioner not to desire.[64] In Weber's mapping of capitalist time, desire is paradoxically inculcated, or a persistent instruction to desire is expressed through the so-called Protestant work ethic, which sees time as a substance to be sold. This myth of time, however inflected by Messianic and Christological notions, is not strictly speaking linear. The production and consumption of goods does not, conceptually, lead to a telos.[65] Instead, the ideal of capitalism is circulation of goods without end, without real purpose. It is a nihilistic vision of time, implicitly.

Selfie practice on social media follows this very code of circulation without limit and without goal, other than continuing the practice of posting. Selfie practice emerges from and extrapolates from capitalist temporality, because selfie practice takes the capitalist idea of time as a substance and maps it onto the image, a digitized flicker on tactile screens. Whereas there are perhaps practical limits to the number of, say, iPhones, the average person can buy, there is almost no limit to the number of selfies the average person can post, share, and like. The practice of circulation merely for the point of circulation that is the core code of capitalism is a temporal code, one that selfie practice imbeds in its essential structure. Social media mimics capitalist time but without materiality's hitch and drag. But embodied mortality's temporal episteme is hard to completely shake. In the midst of writing this book, the pandemic arrived, shadowing even the internet with precisely the hitch and drag of material reality, that is, of mortal being.

Notes

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30 Sayer, *Capitalism and Modernity*, 38–91.
31 Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, Industrial Capitalism," 56–97.
32 Buying a sweater, once, for a friend who was gravely ill with cancer, I learned that the salesperson from whom I was buying the sweater had just lost a friend to a similar illness. The clerk and I talked and ended up weeping together, embracing briefly. But she still took my money as payment for the sweater, and I still gave it. We remained, despite the human intimacy of the encounter, abstract persons in the effect.
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45 Ronald Dworkin, *Justice for Hedgehogs* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 384; and Ronald Dworkin, *Is Democracy Possible Here? Principles for a New Political Debate* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 131.

46 Pistor, *Code of Capital*, 116.
47 I discuss in chapter 7 of this book the extraordinary career of Kylie Jenner, influencer par excellence. But she is a relative rarity. Most of those who grow wealthy off social media are the men who created and run social media companies.
48 John Tagg, *The Disciplinary Frame: Photographic Truths and the Capture of Meaning* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).
49 Trebor Scholz, ed., *Digital Labor: The Internet as Playground and Factory* (New York: Routledge, 2013); Trebor Scholz and Laura Y. Liu, eds., *From Mobile Playgrounds to Sweatshop City* (New York: The Architectural League, 2010); and Nick Dyer-Witheford and Greig de Peuter, *Games of Empire: Global Capitalism and Video Games* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009). See also Trebor Scholz, "What the MySpace Generation Should Know about Working for Free," Urbanetix, June 24, 2008, https://urbanetix.wordpress.com/2008/06/24/trebor-scholz-what-the-myspace-generation-should-know-about-working-for-free/.
50 Nicholas Dunbar, *The Devil's Derivatives: The Untold Story of the Slick Traders and Hapless Regulators Who Almost Blew Up Wall Street... and Are Ready to Do It Again* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business School Publishing, 2011).
51 Isobel Harbison, "Hot Babe," *Art Monthly* 395 (April 2016): 5–8.
52 Amazon I interpret as a social media company that sells material goods; membership in Amazon Prime, for example, pulls the customer into joining, and Amazon Prime Student Campus Managers, college students hired by Amazon to tout its products through social media posts, solidify this fusion of social and commercial worlds that defines social media.
53 Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* (London: Penguin, 1986), 306.
54 Sayer, *Capitalism and Modernism*, 118.
55 Stephen Hawking differentiates the psychological experience of time from the second law of thermodynamics, that is, the nonreturning of physical systems to original states. Because of the dilation of time, even the constancy of the speed of light is subject to small differentials. In other words, entropic change is constant but does not necessarily happen at a constant rate always and eternally. Stephen Hawking, *A Brief History of Time*, 10th anniv. ed. (New York: Bantam Books, 1998).
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60 Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2012).
61 Sayer, *Capitalism and Modernity,* 56–59.
62 Pistor, *Code of Capital*, 23.
63 Frantz Fanon, *Les damnés de la terre* (Paris: La Découverte Poche, 2002); and Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
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3 Embodied Self
Temporality, Ontology, Mortality

Selfie practice emerges from a paradoxical disembodiment, at once positivist and skeptical. In selfie practice, I am not this body that ages or tires. Rather, I am a series of digitized data (expressed as images) in which I appear lovely always, through makeup, photo editing, and, for some practitioners, surgery enacted so as to appear in selfies.[1] Although I discuss Lil Miquela—a selfie influencer who is not a person but the creation of Trevor McFedries and Sara DeCou—later in this book, the case should be made that such entirely computer-generated images are not selfies, in that they return to no embodied self and are not photographic marks of any kind but rather are computer generated. The selfie-self is anchored in embodiment even as it sustains a position of disavowal toward mortal embodiment.

The metaphysics of selfie practice elude Cartesian duality. Selfie practice like positivism presumes the factoid: the "I" in selfie practice is a miniaturized image of a physical face and a body, the platform of transmission controlled by an algorithmic code created and manipulated by social media companies. And yet, despite this capitalist, positivist structure, selfie practice for social media users depends also on faith in a quasi-mystical, disembodied, floating signifier of self. The metaphysics of selfie practice inhere in the constant dispersal, echolalia, and echolocation of the embodied self into algorithm.

While those in my Gen X cohort may often agree with Shoshana Zuboff and Franklin Foer that our privacy is stripped away by social media companies, for digital natives—those born around the beginning the 21st century—the dream of self is often inseparable from the chronic structure of self-revelation in that eerily unmet public sphere called social media.[2] By *unmet* I mean the way that selfies find audience never through direct interaction. Even if the selfie practitioner has direct, embodied interaction with some of her viewers, through selfie practice direct connection is displaced. Selfie-self is the self presented to the gaze of social media, AI combined with human participant viewers, as if this were more valuable than day-to-day embodied interaction with other human beings (or, for that matter, with animals, who are often posed as part of selfies but cannot receive the images as practitioners themselves). The *selfie*, as the name suggests, is a diminutive form of self: it is an image, a miniature in that most screens that show social media do not have life-size frames. Smartphones, the most common transfer point of social media, are typically the size of your hand.

Selfie practice fashions identity as strictly regularized to fit the monotonic and bureaucratically fashioned formats of Instagram and Facebook displays. Within this bureaucratic regularization of self that is social media, selfie-self cedes to temporal

regularization—the time of posts and of responses to posts—whereby the risk of time is shifted to an affective register of totalizing bureaucratic numbness. Social media platforms shoulder time's affect for users, numbing time. But this numbness of time's affect, like anesthesia, is not a solution for time's consciousness.

The affect that accompanies the realization that you cannot go back and change what has happened is melancholic.[3] Even if you are pleased with what has happened, you are propelled beyond it. Selfie practice structures a ritual to numb the affect of temporal embodiment by staging a manipulation of temporality where the user can feel the illusion of controlling her time by projecting an unending image series, a gesture to which she is goaded by social media platform norms to repeatedly and endlessly return, as the algorithmic gaze of social media offers to catch her production of time as image, vouchsafing it as digitized data.[4]

The paradoxical metaphysics of the selfie oscillate between the lure of the disembodied self as dataset and the reality that the source of a selfie is the body imaged as body; hence the unary embodied self emerges through selfie practice that then disperses and makes frangible that locus of self. Selfie practice derives its value from notions of continuous seeing (the ideal of selfie practice is not one selfie but an endless series of selfies endlessly seen); as such, the selfie is not placed temporally with embodied immediacy. The selfie-self does not deliver embodied contact with its viewers: despite arguments that using our fingers to look at selfies is tactile, selfie practice is not embodied in the same way as, say, holding someone's hand while talking to him.[5]

This suppression of the affect of the embodied subject's unconditional place in time is the allure of selfie practice. No one really wants to be mortal. Even as embodied knowing, Maurice Merleau-Ponty argues, is the way we know, we seek to transcend embodied experience.[6] But just as derivatives do not fix the problems of capital distribution, so also selfies, derivatives of seeing, do not fix the problem of mortality, the risk of embodiment.

The lulling repetitions of selfie practice elide or suppress awareness of time's mortal embodied passage, in the gambit of controlled, heavily edited image making or mask making. Even so, selfies fall into time as nullity, derivative from that very mortality of embodiment, the knowledge of which selfie practice strives to suppress. The time of the selfie is the time of trash, refuse, and discardability. The selfie is composed of embodiment pushed away (by photo-editing apps) so as not to haunt us.

Imaginary Lives

A temporal cleavage is intrinsic to portraiture: the image carries on while the body passes away. Think of the haunting portraits of young men and women excavated at Fayum. The images of youthful faces, among the earliest preserved examples of naturalistic portraiture, were once believed to have been painted while the wealthy subjects were young, then kept in their homes to be placed on their coffins at burial years later. But examination of the remains indicates that the portrait subjects simply died young.[7] The paintings are not memories, they are presences. They are presences of temporal extension and limit. The Fayum portraits, beautiful, youthful faces, disinterred, face us through a material process of haunting. Haunting is a bend of the temporal affect, a feeling of going back without, of course, the reality of return.

The temporal episteme, *time*, is the name we give to the feeling that our existence is at once bounded by embodied experience and moves away from embodied experience through traces that are oneiric, conceptual, logical, theoretical, visual, and aural. Selfie practice uses digital code to dislocate or suppress other paths of temporal traces. In selfie practice, trace is bombardment by endless new images. Selfies differ from the portraits at Fayum in obvious and also in less obvious ways. Selfies are not images created on stable material substrate. They depend entirely on digitized code for existence. In this sense, selfies are very unlikely to accidentally survive, in the way that material objects sometimes do, in the way that Fayum portraits did. Selfies subsist in the control of social media companies that run the platforms. Unlike the singular portraits at Fayum, selfies manifest as repeated, episodic tropes, incessantly called forward to displace the bodies that produce such images, to displace affect of the knowledge of the mortal temporality that we all share. The Fayum portraits, engendered surely by the common human desire to be remembered after death, do not replay that desire incessantly (as do selfies) but only once.

Is there anything remiss in wanting to cover up the affect of temporality, that is, to use digitized imagery to placate the pain of embodied time? This is the goal, arguably, of *all* culture, all art—to give a sense of controlling time and making meaning in time to ease the pain of mortal time. But selfie practice emerges as a falsifier of time because of its twinship with capitalist codes of temporality. In capitalist society, we are fixed in an economic bracketing system that also sells us the illusion that we can change our economic status through talent and hard work, even as the vast majority of us stay in the economic bracket to which we were born. But capitalist ideology depends on a belief in movement.[8] Selfie practice taps into this unfounded belief.

Taking Stock

The news cycle of capitalism is the rising and falling of the stock market, a relayed tape of numbers on which social media appears to be visually based, in its ticker tape array of images. A day-old selfie—like the ticker tape of the early 20th century—is already old news. Whereas I might pick up an old photograph of my child and realize, *this was a while ago*, it really has to be years ago before it will register as distinctly old news.[9] He's a teenager now, so photographs of Little League look old. But when he was, say, age 5, photographs of him at age 2 didn't seem ancient. By contrast, selfies seem ancient, almost immediately dated, because they are, literally, dated, a few days after they're posted. A week or so later, they are already old news, as irrelevant as defunct stock prices, because they are presented through the as-if omniscient timestamp format of social media platforms. Selfies don't appear old because you know the person in them has changed. They appear old, almost immediately, because they are digital ticker tapes. Old selfies present the same aesthetic as old calendars, with an inherent creepiness to them.

The urge of the selfie is to assert the contemporaneity of the self, and yet it is precisely that placement in time that is continually undone by the selfie. Nothing, other than an actual funeral's posted photograph, looks more funereal than selfies. Lacking the self-confrontation of a self-portrait (because always already the selfie is interceded by AI), the selfie presents a specific conceptualization of time: the capitalist desire to refuse ritual time, or shuttle it as a marketing ploy. The selfie is not a reflection of time as such but rather of the Western notion of time as power.[10]

The urge of the selfie is to make the self contemporaneous, relevant in the precise moment, but that moment is articulated by the form of selfie practice as endlessly slipping into irrelevance. The paradox of the selfie's relationship to Western, colonialist notions of time inheres in the gesture of the selfie that engages precisely a linear and dominating concept of time even as selfie practice has been taken up with gusto outside the West.[11] Positing a self, the social media participant slips into the structure of colonialist time. An erosive, corrosive differential mark takes hold whereby any aspect of the personal, the vulnerable human, becomes a site of the putative primitive in contrast to the technological. That which is not commandeered by machine becomes then marked as vulnerable and cast as an endless sequence into the past. In this way, the selfie becomes the self as waste. In contemplating this trajectory, I turn to an astonishing series of self-portrait photographs that explore—and contest and reject—this idea of self-wasting.

Haunted Selves

Photographer Graham MacIndoe's self-portrait series, *Coming Clean*, was taken with a cheap digital camera at the turn of the 21st century while he was addicted to heroin. The photographs were printed and shown to the public at Scotland's National Gallery in 2017. These images limn the horizon of the haunted frame of the self-portrait.[12] MacIndoe had forgotten he'd taken the photographs, found them, and decided to exhibit them.[13] As expertly produced color prints, the series was shown more than a decade after MacIndoe recovered from addiction. The images reveal him during a time when he is so sunk into drug use that he does not resemble himself and does not remember taking the images. The images represent a stretch of time when some theories of identity (Immanuel Kant's and John Locke's, for example) that hold the continuity of personal memory as a bedrock of identity would not connect today's MacIndoe to yesterday's MacIndoe, the heroin addict: he is *not himself* in these self-portraits of addiction.[14]

And yet recognizing the images, he claims them as self-portraits, prints them, and exhibits them as such. They *are* self-portraits because of this decision made years after the photographs' initial making. The photographs stage a haunting of self-perception, a peripherally launched self-interrogation, unsparing, unflinching. Though created on a digital camera, the images were not intended for social media. Their creation was the most private of acts, spying on oneself when one was not oneself, capturing oneself in a place between death and life (a heroin stupor, with its slowed pulse and skewed cognition) and a place between choice and compulsion. It is a place between identity and the nullity of identity, the addicted self as the hollowed self, without capacity to remember clearly the span of time of being stoned and without capacity to make the choice to not get stoned.

MacIndoe's act of picking up the camera and taking his own image while using heroin, or while suffering its use of him, is a limit case of self-portraiture in photography. Here, the camera enacts the supervisory self that remembers the nonaddicted MacIndoe (a fine arts photographer before and after his addiction to heroin and a long-distance runner of note) and looks toward a possible future, nonaddicted MacIndoe. The camera intercedes between these selves. The nodus that theorist Graham Harman identifies as a pivot of object-oriented ontology—that physical processes and material object sets cannot alone define the identity of people or of objects—is presented in

MacIndoe's series of self-portraits. For the embodied entity "Graham MacIndoe" that, sober and healthy, finds and prints the self-portraits is not the same as the embodied entity also called "Graham MacIndoe" that used heroin. And yet they are the same man.

Here is the "mutual darkness of objects" that grounds object-oriented ontology.[15] MacIndoe can never know himself only as a body and can never know himself entirely as a disembodied named concept, "Graham MacIndoe." The crossing between the sense of self that we have as embodied entities and the endless incompleteness of precisely that information that marks us as nonidentical with others means that we are always a concept of ourselves yoked to the incompletion of individual embodiment. We are mortal, not eternally fixed. The concept *self* includes the continuous process of embodiment, the naming act of which eludes exhaustive definition of the temporal set called *self*. The photographic self-portrait has a privileged relationship to this embodied self, as it is the mark of light reflected off the skin of the embodied self.

The series *Coming Clean* reveals MacIndoe injecting heroin and slumped half-asleep after injecting the drug. It shows him in New York City boroughs, in domiciles that look as if he is not up to caring for the places where he camps. The series shows him alone in ragged domesticity, though not in junkie flophouses (figures 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, and 3.5). Blood is shown in the photographs—blood of injection wounds—and the images are characterized by the slightly blurry look of low-resolution digital images from the first decade of the 21st century. The images are graphically haunted. In one, the photographer cups his hand to a flame to freebase; the image looks primal, as if fire were a discovery. In the series, MacIndoe does not directly engage the viewer with his gaze but looks through half-opened eyes at his task of shooting up or smoking heroin. A hallmark of the series is his not directly looking at the camera.

Figure 3.1 Graham MacIndoe, *Untitled* (from *Coming Clean*), 2010–2016, inkjet print, 22.86 × 30.48 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

Figure 3.2 Graham MacIndoe, *Untitled* (from *Coming Clean*), 2010–2016, inkjet print, 22.86 × 30.48 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

The self confronting the self here occurs through the camera's gaze, rather than the exchange of gazes between subject and viewer. MacIndoe deploys the phonecam as hidden witness to his suffering. He is suffering in these images, and it is this grief and pain that the images affectively carry.

In this aesthetic of pain and of witnessing pain, MacIndoe's self-portraits perform identity in a haunted frame. They are antiselfies, not intended to be immediately circulated; on the contrary, they are images forgotten at the outset, discarded from the photographer's memory with their very inception. The images were not made for media circulation but forged through the precise pain of moments so dire as to be kept apart from the intrinsic working notion of self. By picking up the camera and shooting images while he suffers the ravages of drug addiction, MacIndoe stages the pain of witnessing. Here the camera is not judgmental nor is it salvific, nor does its gaze *create* the scenes recorded, as in the selfie in which the camera's presence instigates the image. These scenes in MacIndoe's *Coming Clean*, of heroin use, would still have occurred had the photographer not created a self-portrait series from them. They are emphatically not performed *because of* the camera. But they gather additional meaning because of this visual record, showing a confrontation of the self that uses drugs with the self that wants to reach another kind of existence—the self that ultimately MacIndoe becomes when he is able to kick the heroin habit.

Figure 3.3 Graham MacIndoe, *Untitled* (from *Coming Clean*), 2010–2016, inkjet print, 22.86 × 30.48 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

MacIndoe's series of images are notes to self, as Derek Conrad Murray theorizes the phrase.[16] For MacIndoe discovers the images later, when sobriety has altered his gaze, and makes meaning of the images across that transit of time. This tractive conversation of the self with the self, across the struggle to vanquish an addiction to heroin, makes the self-portraits heroic in a harsh way. He is not pretending to be an addict to look cool; he also hasn't used filtering apps to hide the harms the drugs do to his body. The notes to himself are not trivial but *in extremis*, they testify that making the mark of self-confrontation can save us.

I am not arguing that this or any art is manifest raw honesty. But self-portraiture, if it is successful visually, cuts close to the bone, its power and its force confront the self with and within its haunted frame. Faking that confrontation means eluding it, visibly. In *Coming Clean,* we see the opposite of fake, we see testimony, the visual evidentiary force that MacIndoe fakes nothing. Instead, his work opens a fault line of vision. The series breaks apart conceptual temporality: viewing the self-portraits, we are in the contemporary moment where the photographer, now sober, views his addiction as a bereft state of self, and we are *also* with the damaged, suffering MacIndoe who bears the torture of addiction in the photographs.[17] The images represent and *enact* this division. Our gaze, as audience after the fact, instates a haunted frame for the images.[18] In our gaze is the capacity for empathy with the addict's wounds or the capacity to turn away or to cast judgment. MacIndoe exposes the images to that vulnerable place of multivalent haunting.

Coming Clean turns on the revelation of embodied vulnerability. In the photographs, he captures himself at risk often between mental states, between being

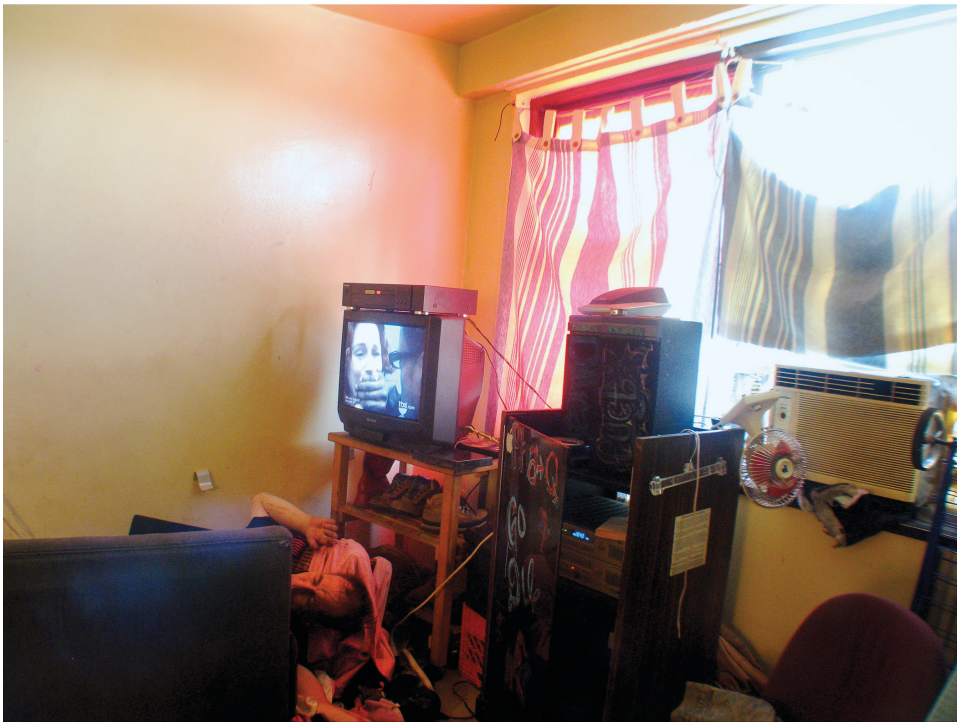

Figure 3.4 Graham MacIndoe, *Untitled* (from *Coming Clean*), 2010–2016, inkjet print, 22.86 × 30.48 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

asleep and awake, or half-aware and half too dissolute to notice. As heroin, an opioid, makes it difficult not to nod off (sedation a typical and at times dangerous side effect), MacIndoe captures his own image, in these self-portrait photographs, just before or even just as sedation is setting in; he is collapsing or rising from collapse in the images. Bloody wounds of entry where the needle has been inserted seem to vein toward us at the implied edge of the picture frame. His face expresses extreme disorientation, and the spatial field of the self-portraits follows suit, with MacIndoe falling toward the edge of the frame in some pictures. He is falling into the picture frame and falling toward us, the viewers.

The pain of being addicted is the subject of the self-portraits, but because they are taken by the addict with—at the time—a blunted awareness of his own suffering, the haunted subtext of the photographs is this very condition of self-division that is also the boundary of *any* self-portrait. The man suffering the throes of addiction in the photographs is an evacuated self, a person between life and death, a mortal self confronted through the mark of the image.

Remarkably, in *Coming Clean*, the addicted person is also the one who decides to photograph himself, even as he seems almost entirely unable to see himself as he is and unable to remember what he is experiencing. And yet there is some part of him that admits, permits, and conjures the camera's ability to set a haunted frame around

Figure 3.5 Graham MacIndoe, *Untitled* (from *Coming Clean*), 2010–2016, inkjet print, 22.86 × 30.48 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

this addiction—to create these self-portraits. In fractured and always double time, he stages a confrontation between himself as an addict and himself as a sober person looking back on this addiction. In this sense, the temporality of the series is one of radical estrangement. And that makes it exemplary of the self-division inherent in the self-portrait.

In the selfie, by contrast, you present yourself with imminent desire for and recognition of the contemporary gaze of as many others as possible; that's what the selfie, embedded in social media, is for. You present yourself for the gaze of the AI that assembles selfie looks in the context of social media platforms. But in the self-portrait, you present the haunted condition of your own gaze marked by earlier wounds of the gazes of others. It is, then, a temporal (not necessarily aesthetic) distinction that I make between the selfie and the self-portrait.

MacIndoe, in the memory-annihilating anguish of heroin addiction, remembers the gaze of an other who is not addicted. This remembered other includes himself before he was addicted, but also his parents, his faithful girlfriend, and his son, all of whom are part of the idea of his future non-addicted self, able to see him suffering and reconcile that grief to survive.[19] In this series, then, he faces his death and struggles to draw this shadow self of addiction forward into survival through the memory of the gazes of others.

The radical division of self that MacIndoe seeks to heal in these self-portraits is the core task of self-portraiture. It is the space where death—mortal time—is not suppressed but faced. The mortal self is not what self-portraiture seeks to hide but rather reveal in its haunted condition. Roland Barthes writes correctly that failed portraits seek to hide the death-mask quality of the photograph. Aesthetically successful photographic self-portraits confront the death of the subject through the haunted frame of self-seeing: they make use of the death-mask quality. We see ourselves as social entities marked by the gazes of others, but it is through the introspective introjection of that gaze that we know ourselves as finite, limited, and vulnerable, that is, as individual selves. This extreme revelation of vulnerability is the genius of *Coming Clean*; the photographs reveal the vulnerable body, but they also signify the vulnerability of longing for nirvana that is the core urge of addiction to opioids and maybe also of art. Above all, the photographs in *Coming Clean* reveal the openness of the photographer as he allows the haunting gaze of the other to see his despair in addiction. He makes the decision, as a sober person, to reveal his earlier suffering; this is the turn of the self-portrait at its crux.

The series title, *Coming Clean,* implies not only becoming sober but also confessing—*come clean* being a phrase meaning tell it all, confess the whole of it. The temporal gap between the time of taking the images and the time of claiming the images as self-portraits is crucial to the work. Time is of the essence here. Time is the subject of all self-portraits but it is particularly charged in MacIndoe's series *Coming Clean*. The gap in time institutes the photographer's confession and also his insistence on innocence—for it is from this perspective of innocence claimed *not* in contrast to but *through the process of experience* that the images have their force.

The temporal frame of identity is sharply delineated by MacIndoe's series of self-portraits. For Kant and Locke, the self is a contiguous set of memories.[20] Merleau-Ponty and Harman understand this set of memories as the darkness of object knowing objects, that is, the embodied self an object among objects. Here, in the way that the *Phenomenology of Perception* troubles the purity of Kant's unity of apperception, thickening the idea of the unity of perception of self, MacIndoe's self-portraits stress a critical division within the self.[21] Rather than a unified reel of mnemonic experience, his self-portraits while addicted to heroin argue for a fragmented self that is haunted by the violence, or violation, of embodied trauma. One draws here also from Jacques Lacan's theory of the *Tyche* or the touch of the real.[22] And yet, the question of what is the "real" is opened rather than answered by these self-portraits. Is reality the past addiction? Is it the capacity of the artist to see the addiction? To survive it? Is reality the gaze of the recovered addict looking back? Is it, then, that temporal reality is strangest and strongest when we turn and look back?

Clean Hands

The use of the word *clean* in MacIndoe's title suggests a comment of Theodor Adorno, theorizing the problem of ontology without individual being. Adorno theorizes the problematic connection, in the history of philosophy, between ontology and identity, memorably commenting that those who theorize *being without beings* are academics who "don't want to get their hands dirty."[23] For Adorno, any theory of being that is abstracted from granular identity, such as embodied human identity, moves away from what can be logically "thought" and becomes a form of description outside of

logic. Adorno moves in the direction of Ludwig Wittgenstein's argument for the enigmatic but indissoluble link between language and the real, embodied pain and risk. For the notion of identity, like the "language game," is never freed from its traction with embodied perception. As Wittgenstein argues, it returns through a kind of traumatic reenactment to fasten us to always incomplete narrative structures.[24]

Accordingly, MacIndoe's self-portraits in *Coming Clean* signify an intention that they are always on the verge of completing, the intention of the subject's death, but that they never complete, as the subject returns from his spectral status as addict to reclaim the embodied self that both appears in the photographs and encloses his memory of self. And yet, this memory of self troubles the inclusion of the recognition of the moments contained in the self-portraits.

For the photographer does not recall this time, and yet in many of the photographs he seems to be looking *for* himself, looking for his future self. In one image, leaning over a white porcelain sink, MacIndoe stares toward his phonecam. He looks spent, exhausted, his arm propped over the sink so as to receive the needle. The moment is a lacuna of self. Somehow the bathroom, though being used to shoot heroin, looks almost clean, as if the space could become a site for ablution. In this image, the photographer looks up, as if he's suddenly aware of something beyond the act of shooting up, suddenly seeing a world outside the confining, repetitive need to dose himself.

Uncannily, here, he looks up as if he were seeing himself seeing himself, seeing his future self—as if he were ready to reach out to this future self. It is in this double-seeing that the *Tyche* or touch inserts itself between the skin and the imagined self. This self-portrait is not just the imagined space of self-representation but rather also a sliver and fragment of the touch of fate (as the Greek *τύχη* translates to fortune, luck, or fate). In *Coming Clean*, the embodied trauma of heroin addiction mnemonically enters, through the lapsus of the self seeing the self, the idea of identity; through this insertion, the wound of physical suffering is transmogrified into an image instating ontological heft. Instating the capacity to survive this present moment of suffering and to see it anew, in a future that may or may not arrive, is the risk of the self-portrait.

In these risks, MacIndoe, to invoke Adorno's comment, is *willing to get his hands dirty*. He is willing not to whitewash what he has endured in addiction because he is willing to see this former self as what he also *is*. No longer an addict, he does not deny that he once was addicted. The images stage the imbricated, always partly liminal space, where the symbolic field of identity knows, though always unfully, the mutual darkness of objects within which the embodied self takes its place.

The temporal compression and fragmentation that is at the core of the event of any self-portrait is intensified in *Coming Clean*. The portraits as noted were created by an addicted MacIndoe, forgotten, discovered by an embodied subject also named MacIndoe—but no longer addicted—and then printed, framed, and circulated in gallery and museum space. The question posed by self-portraits of when *are* the subjects themselves is intensified by MacIndoe.

Is *Coming Clean* a self-portrait of MacIndoe as a heroin addict or is it a portrait of his recovery, testimony to his ability to see himself from the perspective of the non-addict? In the series, it is the non-addict who alone can deliver the images to us. MacIndoe is both Eurydice and Orpheus, leading his image from the purgatory of addiction to the audience before whom this confrontation of self with self is staged.[25] In an image catching MacIndoe as he falls into a heroin-induced stupor, we see his hand reaching out as if reaching toward the viewer. He sprawls on a bed, his eyes not

yet entirely closed (figure 3.1). The image captures him as if he were falling toward us, reaching out a hand, as if we could reach in and save him. The instability of identity is thrust toward us. That hand reaches toward us, asking *who is* Graham MacIndoe, the person who falls toward us or the person who salvages the visual remnants of that fall to create art? But it also asks us *who are* we, in our own embodied history, and how do we fall toward the image?

As Barthes argues, the photograph is hallucinatory, a kind of congealed repository.[26] MacIndoe falling toward us, as if through the picture plane, is at once a performance of his memory of self and an invocation of our embodied experience of being a self; that is, specifically, the experience of vertigo of being always and continuously vulnerable to fall—into injury, mortality, fate, or whatever it is that will catch us. For MacIndoe, in this series, the wasted self is overcome, a kind of self-salvation performed through an almost Christological sequence of images of suffering.

Wasted Selves

In *Plastic Capitalism: Contemporary Art and the Drive to Waste*, Amanda Boetzkes traces the use of trash in contemporary art, in particular the use of plastic trash. For Boetzkes, plastic signifies the curve of capitalism, a material manifestation of how capital circulates.[27] In MacIndoe's self-portraits, *trash* is not an external noun, but a verb, as in *trashing* oneself.[28] Waste in capitalism is not, ultimately, tied to any specific material substance, the proliferation of plastics notwithstanding. Rather, it is the conceptual and material effect, the other side of the conceptual coin, of the urge to "be productive." But the *product* of capitalism is always, necessarily, also its *waste* because capitalism feeds on purchasing new products. The so-called productive (in capitalist terms) acts of creating an object, selling the object, buying the object also are the creators of waste, trash. MacIndoe's self-portraits, *Coming Clean*, contend with the trashed self, that is, with images of identity at the edge of capitalist dreams of productivity. I began this discussion noting that the horizon of the self-portrait is the engagement with the wasted self, waste of self, that MacIndoe brilliantly and poignantly leverages. He lays bare the gambit of identity in our time: that it is a product to be used. In capitalism, we are all *users*. MacIndoe's leveraging of the trashed self, the wasted self, though obviously as a point of resistance, reveals faults of the capitalist system of identity.

By contrast to this searing self-portraiture, the capitalist self of selfie practice is a self that is produced so as to paper over the fault lines of capitalist waste, a self without fragment, a self seamlessly unforgotten by him or her or them. The goal of the selfie, however disavowed, is to be seen by AI in a continuous flume of ever-new images. This is the case regardless of what selfie posters perceive or believe: the social media platform is run by AI, seen by algorithmic codes that then feed images to other users. There is no privacy for self-seeing or memory's curved mirror. The goal of selfie practice for social media platform companies is that every participant is posting frequently enough that there are no gaps to their time line or Instagram page and that their eyes are never far from the advertising that pays social media companies. The quotidian temporal act of building this phantasmagorical visual selfie-self militates against exploration of the gaps, aporias, lacunae, fragments, and wounds that make up identity. By contrast, MacIndoe's self-portraits across the ravaged gap of addiction dramatically show how self-portrait can move into this space of time's cut that the selfie cannot access but instead habitually covers.

To confront that we are fragmented and seek to heal that temporal tear that constitutes our identity is the task of the self-portrait, but not the selfie. The task of the selfie is to avoid that confrontation. The fragmentation of identity stems not only from the loss of a nonsymbolic embodied union with the mother, because this hypothetical pre-lapsarian plenitude is itself imagined.[29] But also, the gap or wound at the core of identity is the cut of time itself. Time inserts itself, cuts into a continuous self. You are always moving toward and away from some sense of self, as time breaks continuity of perception and action. Time violates us. But time also is the epistemic ground of identity, the only conceptual space of suture (we build ourselves in time and from time), the tegument of pulling together an agentic self across the fault of temporality is also time.

Kantian identity—the unity of apperception, like Lockean identity—defines the self as a set of continuous memories; but these obviously fail to address trauma, fragmentation, and the kind of discontinuities that MacIndoe's series exposes. Lacan's theories of *Tyche* (reality's touch), and of *l'objet petit a*, address the idea of the wound of identity but are mired in sexist paradigms that prevent logical analysis.[30] The idea of haunting that Avery Gordon develops, even as she does not apply the theory as a core of identity, along with her work on the sociology of the trace, offers a way of understanding identity as a space of agency that is always contested in the face of vulnerability and societal interconnection.[31] But still at the horizon of ontology, the agentic self persists. Marx returns to the idea of a specter haunting us: the self is haunted by material conditions of the sociohistorical nexus.

Choosing Time

Time resists our agency, it is the epistemic hollow at the core. In capitalism, the concept of time is twisted to perform as coconspirator to profit maximization: the idea of maximizing productivity is the dream of controlling time. The slippage in capitalist productivity, though, is the way that "use" and "waste" of time eludes the production of desired goods. Always, with manufactured goods comes the detritus of the manufacturing process, the mess of pollution, and the goods themselves that become pollution as they are used up and cast out as waste. Transportation industry byproducts pollute immediately, with fossil fuels and electricity use and also with discarded vehicles swelling junkyards.

The code of capital that attempts to create the illusion of time's productivity launches a perverse idea that time itself can be "wasted." The very idea of time as possible waste product is *created by* capitalist structures of time, a way of deflecting attention from the actual waste product of capitalism: environmental pollution. In selfie culture, the self is manufactured as both product—image—and waste—old image, yesterday's post, a reiterative process that seems to soothe the wound of time in the self but paradoxically accentuates it, with the knowledge of the defunct status of old posts built deeply and ineradicably into the practice. The self that is always moving toward its status as waste is fundamental to the selfie.[32]

Gaps of Time

The self-portrait, in contrast to the selfie, confronts the cut of time in identity. Because of its imbrication in social media platforms, the horizon of the selfie is the algorithm that controls how the social media platform is viewed. The temporality of the selfie

is traded to social media programmers who fabricate the functional horizon, or limit, of the self's perceived temporal episteme. In selfie practice, the individual wound of time, at the core of identity, is ceded to a corporation to be managed by algorithmic structures.

The contemporary mythic status of the men (and it is almost entirely a male-dominated, largely white profession) who create code suggests the problem of this very structure.[33] In the sociality of social media, the idea that one should *oneself* carry the wound of time is replaced by the belief that algorithmic structures carry it for us. The near-religious fervor of belief in the capacity of algorithms, the mathematical equivalent of allegories, to carry identity is a turn toward a deeper embedding of capitalist dictates within the social field of the self.[34] The belief in the precision of algorithms, that they map the boundaries of the self more efficiently than other heuristic tools, is the engine of social media's rapid infusion into daily life.

Closed Sets

The structure of identity in selfie practice is held within a bounded set of algorithms. The structure of identity in the selfie is created for being seen by AI, a continuous and shallow vision. A controlling force, shaped by social media platform creators and managers, works to enhance profitability for those companies. Outside social media there are many forces in capitalism by which businesses intrude and make the effort to shape identity toward their own profitability. But other than social media there is no social space (apart from maybe privately owned prisons) in which one company or type of company sets *all* the parameters for identity's vista. It is social media companies' seamless fusion of control of the mood of time with their product that makes them able to delimit the structure of identity.

Unlike the selfie, the self-portrait frames a dialectic of the ontological foundation of that epistemic structure that is identity. It frames the return to the self's embeddedness in temporality as continuous loss. It is not the symbol that cuts the self but time that wounds the self and symbol that acts toward self-suture.[35] That tight bond is altered by the phonecam's automatic application of filtering and editing apps and by social media selfie practice's almost universal embrace of extensive use of photo-editing apps.

I do not indicate here a visible line between real and fake as rather between the visualized temporality of vulnerability and irreversibility and the visualized temporality of invulnerable reversibility.[36] The image digitized and edited is not actually invulnerable—it is code—likewise, photo-editing apps can make the individual appear younger, slimmer, whatever it is, in an image but obviously do not change the material reality of the person's embeddedness in time. The aesthetic of the selfie moves away from the ontology of objects that is the dialectic of symbol and material, as selfies work by reframing the temporal episteme of viewers. In the social space of selfie practice, the absurdity of reversible time is implicitly sold, a kind of corporate snake oil.

Haunting Time

Analog photographic processes have long been linked to haunting in the public imagination.[37] Spirit photography manipulated glass-plate photographic techniques to create the illusion of ghosts or spirits ostensibly revealed by the camera's preternatural gaze. Even as spirit photography was a scam—cameras do *not* see ghosts—its

popularity reveals something intrinsic to photography.[38] Some photographs show us what we usually do not see. This happens because of the way the analog photograph freezes the gaze, holding still details that in quotidian looking we miss or fail to contemplate. Haunting is manifested in spirit photography through manipulation of the analog image, but it stays in self-portrait photography through the photographer's willingness *not* to manipulate the image, instead to use it to see the haunted frame of her own identity.

Consider how Nan Goldin's self-portrait (1998) in the Lodge at Belmont, a treatment center for substance abuse, shows a specter in the mirror. Here, Goldin faces herself in crisis. Her long use of psychoactive street drugs renders her vulnerable, and she comes to the treatment center to save herself. A moment of heightened self-confrontation in this self-portrait, taken in 1998, must be read in conversation with Goldin's 1980s masterpieces, *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* and *I'll Be Your Mirror*. A decade and a half after the heady early days of creating those series of iconic images, Goldin turns inward. Many of her friends in the intervening years have died of AIDS-related illness and of drug abuse, and Goldin stands in this self-portrait deeply alone. Insofar as the camera is placed slightly behind her and directed toward the mirror, we the audience are sutured—or fixed—to her gaze, her point of view. We see her as she sees herself, alone in the mirror, facing something like the aftermath of the male gaze, when the party's over. The room is stark, monastic. Light comes through the panes of the window set parallel with the mirror, suggesting that the mirror is a space for seeing anew, a visual frame in which she can reclaim herself.

Consider also the self-portrait from 1984, *Nan One Month after Being Battered,* discussed in chapter 8 of this book. Here, in this earlier image, the confrontation with the self is rendered stark and verges on a life-or-death choice. Goldin, having survived a brutal beating from her boyfriend Brian, makes the decision that although she still loves him she will not go back to him. She stages this self-portrait as an encounter between the Nan who submits to Brian's violent male prerogative and the Nan who refuses his male gaze. The assertion of her own gaze, then, is paramount: she challenges herself to not go back, no matter how much she loves him. She *dolls herself up* for the self-portrait: curling her hair, applying lipstick, eye makeup, and pearls. Excruciatingly, she appears to have plucked her eyebrows, despite the bruised state of her eyes. That the beating took place a month before the photograph adds to the pathos of the image. She imagines herself having almost healed when we, the audience, see only how wounded she still is.

Frame of Self

The haunted frame of identity or the haunted condition of identity is a response to the problem of embodied being. Kantian identity—the unity of apperception, defining the self as a set of continuous memories—notably fails to address trauma, fragmentation. The idea of haunting that Avery Gordon develops offers a way of understanding identity as a space of agency that is always contested. It stays at the horizon of ontology, the agentic self, a specter haunting us.[39] The self is haunted by material conditions of the sociohistorical nexus. The self-portrait risks its subject at the boundary of materiality and the social imaginary, proleptically haunted by the viewer's embodied gaze.

Return to Goldin's *Nan One Month after Being Battered*. The self-portrait is a conversation between Nan and Nan. It becomes an iconic image, received by some viewers as an emblem of feminist resistance, by others as a tragic expression of a lost era, and by still others as melodrama. But emphatically it is *received* by human others. And this reception depends on the image's origin in a conversation between Nan and Nan: self-confrontation. Inasmuch as selfie practice eludes self-confrontation it skirts the edges of conversation with others. On the surface, selfie seems to trigger the other's response. But the conversation—the human not algorithmic response to another person's face—is definitively undercut in selfie practice. The stillness of watching, of understanding that outside the image there is nothing (*il n'y a pas de hors-texte*), this that is the essence of language as game and practice is missing from selfie practice.[40]

Polaroid Redux

Consider Lucas Samaras's eerie self-portrait Polaroids.[41] The photographer has dedicated much of his working life to pushing the boundary of the self-portrait; the repetitions of his work, its seriality, on a facile level could suggest the selfie. But there is nothing cleanly calculable about Samaras's self-stripping. His self-portraits ache with raw turns of ascesis, emptying the self before the other.[42] The selfie cannot risk this level of exposure because it always already is framed as a product, embedded in social media where the core objective is to return tomorrow with a new selfie.

The temporal frame of the selfie, then, is smoothed of time's interruptive cut and also is without the capacity to move beyond quotidian diurnal time. By contrast, the time of the self-portrait—for example, MacIndoe's *Coming Clean* series or Goldin's *Nan One Month after Being Battered*—is a time of return and self-retrieval. In Goldin's self-portrait, unmistakably written into the title is the gap of time: *one month after*. The fragmentation of self through time is also the space in which the self sutures, recovers, and becomes an identity nonidentical with the gazes of others. In other words, subjectivization is not merely the self expressing the forces of others' desires, it is the confrontation of the self with its own mortal pace. In the self-portrait photograph, identity is constructed of the intersecting haunting gazes of others, yes, but the ultimate ghost is one's own encounter with embodied mortality.

Identity is a haunted frame wherein the gazes of others echo but also are contested by some kernel that we inductively claim as *myself,* the substance of self this unique embodied relationship we each have to our experience and memory of the material world. Hence, the gazes of others make up our vision of self—but never entirely, because our own capacity for experience is constitutive. Jacques Lacan writes of the distortion or *anamorphosis* of self-seeing. The construct, "I saw myself seeing myself," is comparable to the distortions of a convex mirror, a popular optical prop in early modern portraiture.[43] A self-portrait can be about more than self-assertion, it can break down the terms of self-assertion, asking *why* we persist. But because of the selfie's endless and unbreakable imbrication in capitalist structures of social media platforms, it cannot question the terms of its own persistence as visual mark. The selfie is bounded and partitioned by social media, and social media is a capitalist platform that ultimately will insist on the presentation of the self uncut by time because only this is the self to which goods can be endlessly marketed. The key trope of selfie practice is cultivating images each attesting to the subject's evasion of the elusive distance within identity.

Babysitting Capitalism

There is a quality of relentless enthrallment to the supervising gaze of capitalism that frames selfie practice. Consider: in going through my day as an embodied subject, I encounter multiple constricting matrices of historicized seeing. I'm a cisgender woman, recognizable as a woman, so in public situations it's likely that people will not listen to me unless they're small children. But around the deeply historicized way of seeing that is gender, I'm also to some extent able to maneuver.[44] I can, as a long-distance runner, experience almost entirely, albeit for relatively short periods of time, elusion of the historical matrix of how, as a woman, I'm seen by others. The embodied experience of running for miles on largely untraveled back roads is the experience of not being seen as a woman for as long as no one drives by and catcalls. Whether these are structurally meaningful freeing experiences can be contested, but my point is to contrast embodied experience, out of sight of others, with selfie practice. Embodied experience can, up to a point, be modulated to resist the totalizing gaze of hegemonic power structures. Selfie practice cannot because it is always already occurring *within* the totalizing gaze of that capitalist function called social media.

Time is the most personal of affects—its simultaneity and irreversibility making it always with us all and yet also with us alone. One's feeling of being in the same temporal space of others and yet positionally different can be a source of anxiety, a feeling acknowledging that everyone and everything on earth right now is contemporaneous but each person, animal, and object moves through time differentially. *Here I am,* says the selfie even as what constitutes "here" continually dissipates along an axis of the affect of time. Psychologist Sherry Turkle writes that social media makes us alone together, implying precisely why social media and selfie practice exert such a powerful hold.[45] For time itself makes us alone together, as we are all together in time and apart in our differential mortal placement therein.

Selfie practice in social media depends on blurring this partitioning and collective affect of time. We move through time with all material objects, and yet time applies to us individually as embodied subjects. The chilling feeling that we are at once inescapably bound together through time and also isolated in time is precisely what selfie practice in social media attends to, soothing the affect of time, making us feel that as a collective digitized mass we have stabilized time. We have become a collective mass of images, through selfie practice, rather than individuate objects in time. But these images do not make us a collective entity in mortal time.

The nonrecuperability of material change emerges into the epistemic field as the melancholic affect of time. This melancholy affect, time, is appeased in capitalist structures by reified repetitions of purchasing. But of all capitalist products, it is social media that most fully mobilizes the numbing of the affect of time to turn a profit. Social media's selling of this affect of time emerges from earlier capitalist practices that sell a sense of temporal order through manifest control of space-time.

Selling Time

Social media is partly a scion of the transportation industry, capitalist practices that compel people to become abstracted bodies moved through social space allocated according to class privilege. Consider, say, Chicago's O'Hare Airport as an example of

capitalist structures of reified embodied repetition that sooth the melancholy of time's affect. Flights are constantly moving people through set routes at set scalar marks (at specific times). The seven a.m. flight to Los Angeles will run every morning, barring mishap. But despite this set of repetitions, you can never take the same flight twice. Change is constant and time is the feeling we get when faced by this endlessness of the changing of the material world.[46]

The circular gestures that capitalism manufactures to sell a sense of controlling the affect of time then precede social media platforms; even so, social media singularly harnesses the selling of the affect of time. O'Hare airport and the Los Angeles freeway system, like any airport and any highway system, are built on the premise of moving us through material change as if we controlled material change. However, rather than selling the actual movement of bodies, as the transportation industry does, social media sells the movement of bodies' images. Social media is an airline that never stops transporting bodies, the body-as-product, an endless circling highway with selfies as vehicles.

Bureaucratic Self

Facebook and Instagram are visualizations of bureaucracy.[47] In social media feeds, each life is neatly compressed and fixed in small visual slots, like millions of people waiting in line, docile bodies. Not only are the image boxes of selfies miniature—the size of an iPhone usually, maybe the size of a laptop screen—but they are also further broken into time-like intervals that masquerade as events. (Facebook and Instagram posts are nonevents: they are space-like but don't actually have space; they are time-like but don't really inhabit time, only instead cast the pretense of its marks).

Social media replicates the experience of bureaucratic capitalism, while giving you the illusion of control lacking in embodied bureaucratic encounters. At the post office, the doctor's office, or the airport, you need to stand or sit still, you have to open your mouth, sit tight during the flight, provide the right money for postage, and not break in line. The post office, the doctor's office, the airport, and the airplane are not controlled by the same interests or people, but they are controlled in similar ways: people who enter into them are constrained. Wild gestures of the body, weeping, wailing, or dancing, in such spaces, will result in immediate suppression of the body and voice. Not by the government alone but by the intersecting interests of big business, big pharma, police, and government. It is Foucault's theory of governmentality extrapolated here—capitalism functions as the ultimate purveyor of the control of the citizen body in social media.[48] Even when selfie-assertion is political, as in Ai Weiwei's work, it is still circulated on social media. Even Ai's brilliant political use of selfie practice is a long sequence of emphatic iterations amounting to assertion of self. Selfie practice rehearses bureaucratic capitalist constraints of embodiment, taking the familiar tropes of waiting and doing as told into a realm in which we feel we—the selfie posters—are agentic. Even as our selfie practice only brings us deeper into bureaucratic capitalist structures.

As I discuss further in chapter 7 of this book, Facebook and Instagram, ingeniously and insidiously, offer a matching mirror for the ways that our citizen bodies are controlled in worldwide capitalism. At the pharmacy, I must be docile and show my prescription, for the profit of the pharmaceutical industry (and yes, maybe also my own benefit because if I actually have strep throat, antibiotics will be appreciated). Or, in the

airplane, no matter how uncomfortable I am, I must render myself a human package that can be moved through space and time, for the profit of the airline industry.

On Facebook or Instagram, just as in the pharmacy or the airplane, for the profit of Mark Zuckerberg, I must show my face and body—that is, make myself into a docile image package for the consumption of the platform—a selfie-self. There is limited leeway regarding what I put into the image because if its content does not suit the algorithm, it will scarcely be seen, it won't be moved into others' feeds by the algorithms that are social media. Just as in the pharmacy I cannot start screaming about God's toenails and not be quickly removed, on Instagram I cannot, in taking a radical photograph, rebel against the algorithm. Such visual rebellion in the context of social media is effaced because the algorithm will simply push to the top of feeds that which matches what has come before, feeds that match the algorithm's scripted gaze.[49] In selfie practice, then, I serve myself up to bureaucratic time management, allowing it to become entwined with my deepest sense of myself as an identity in time.

Inocula

Selfies inebriate us with the apparently endless supply of newness. Social media projects the aura of immunity to time, of escaping the affective weight of embodied mortal time. Unlike printed photographs, old posts don't need to be shielded from sunlight, they don't need to be dusted. But more to the point, who thinks about old posts—unless showcased as throwbacks—while we're constantly bombarded with new posts? The past is discarded with a soundless glissade in social media practice. That's the marketed gambit of social media platforms: to keep up the constant press of new images so that our actual immersion in decay can't catch our attention. Selfies, despite seeming to project narcissistic devotion to the self, are the antivanitas. Here is not a confrontation with death but a reiterative turning from any acknowledgment that embodied knowing occurs in temporal limits. The haunting affect of time in still images, particularly still images of human beings, creates, as Barthes argues, a fatality of the image.[50] But unlike earlier photographic modes, social media produces incessant repetitions of similar though nonidentical images.[51]

Sublime Selfie

The numerically overwhelming feeling of social media selfie practice—the hundreds of thousands of selfies posted daily—brings us to a kind of sublime precipice. The sublime is connected to loss of boundaries of the self, the unknowable and unseeable, that surround the prospects of knowing and of seeing. The blindness inherent in the sublime is its connection to what Maurice Blanchot calls experiences of "night," or nonbeing.[52] Barthes, drawing from Blanchotian aesthetics, likens the space of death to the imaginary space of the photograph, arguing that the "eidos of the photograph is death."[53] One notes in the terrain of social media practice generally and selfie practice in particular the encounter with a sublime edge of death.[54] Needless to say, people posting selfies do not generally feel that they are interacting with the sublime edge of death. The goal of posting selfies is not to diffuse the self in a meaninglessly large number of images, proving the near nonexistence of us as we pass through time, and yet that *is* the effect of the sublimely massive numbers that circumscribe selfie practice, billions of selfies.[55] Likewise, following social media platform posts is marketed as a

way of staying engaged, of *not missing out*. And yet, if you look at an Instagram feed that you do not follow, that is, one to which you do not subscribe, an overwhelming sense that you are looking at a page from an undertaker's business emerges. This sense emerges from several aesthetic vectors.

In selfie-world, most subjects are heavily made-up, as heavily maquillaged as corpses readied for viewing. Faces look fake because of material maquillage combined with photo-editing apps that apply makeup and photo-editing apps like Facetune that alter features; the "Instaface" cyborg look inhabits that uncanny valley that is also shared by corpses. Selfie poses congeal into rehearsed stock tropes, and you start to see the deathliness around the edges of the project. I don't mean simply that everyone who posts selfies is mortal and headed at some point toward death. That is Barthes's argument about photography in general, and a correct one, but insufficient when applied to the use of photographic digital substratum of selfie practice. I mean that the urge to foist from invisibility the image of self is itself a direct reflection on the non-returning opportunities of mortal existence, and this urge is visible in selfie practice even as the temporal repetitiousness of selfie practice seeks to elide this very foundation.

The repetitious chaos of selfie images—a thousand times a thousand times a thousand duck-face poses of young women—deepens one's sense of the thrown-ness of identity in capitalism in much the same way that driving past decaying industrial zones can give you an eerie comprehension of capitalism's core nihilism. Rather than making one feel connected to life, looking at random Instagram pages makes you aware of how transient and disjointed is this passage through mortal temporality, time's affect.

Disappearing Acts

Social media practice is tightly wedded to traditional terms of gender not only because social media platforms are largely created by straight cisgender males but also because social media as such is seamlessly welded to capitalist circulation. The effect is of an amplification chamber wherein the only way to change the discourse is to become silent, or boycott.[56] The emphasis on visualizing traditional femininity emerges precisely from social media's core product: selling a numbing of the affect of time. No matter how you live, you carry the affect of time (or, the emotional experience of entropy, the embodied epistemic encounter of the movement toward chaos of all systems). You are not a young person forever, not healthy forever, and you know you will not be alive forever.

Social media sells the feeling that you are in control of the affect of time. That you control your time line, that your past won't disappear—that your face, aging all the time, will look ageless so held by Facetune apps. Even so, if you are a feminine person, you will begin to disappear from social media as you age, because social media platforms continue to have a fresh supply of young women to make use of. Feminine people, cisgender women and trans women, in social media praxis, stand as signs for youth, pawns through which the lucrative transaction of faux timelessness on social media is played. Even as celebrity influencer Kylie Jenner, discussed in depth in chapter 7 of this book, and a small number of feminine influencers have become wealthy through canny deployment of social media, the overwhelming majority of young women posting selfies get used entirely, as image-goods, or image-as-goods. In the context of social media selfie practice, the arrow of time spears the feminine.

Social media platforms are made to create the appearance of continued life, and they do so even if (in rare cases) their putative subject is death. Beyond the use of social media accounts for mourning the deceased, in selfie practice the temporality of blankness is prominent, as social media platforms organize selfies like calendars. They are serialized photographically based images, not in the tradition of serial artwork but instead the tradition of ticker tapes; they are sustainable only in the quick glance and not beyond it.

Aporias

Absorption in social media consists of experiencing a number of unsuturable epistemic gaps or aporias. Selfie posting, and responding to others' selfie posts, is neither embodied nor disembodied as an activity. Before the screen, we still have bodies, obviously, and yet we interact largely without them in tow (we use our hands, our eyes, and we react viscerally, emotively, to various seen and read posts). We use our hands and eyes as tools to access a realm that is clearly not fully embodied.

To be clear about this point, take the extreme and tragic example of the 2014 disaster of the ferry sinking off the coast of South Korea, when young students were reaching out to their parents through social media. Their parents were in no danger of drowning, yet emotionally the parents were devastated to see these posts. Our bodies, in social media, are vulnerable to emotion—that's a vulnerability but, of course, not the same as physical risk in immediate space-time. On social media, we engage through gaps of time—computer technology's staccato time between posts rather than the linear time of modernity, or the circular time of tradition. Even *in extremis*, in the tragic example of Sewol, there is an instated gap: the parents could, devastatingly, view their child's post and yet could not reach the child. They could not save them, only watch. Horrifically, they received the ultimate bad news.

This temporality of constant *waiting* is at the core of the selfie even as the staccato beat of social media access feels endless (the algorithms constantly feeding us exactly what we've consumed before). Moving back to more quotidian social media actions, in social media's thrall one posts and waits for response. One waits for others' posts. The endless beat of gaps is the essence of the aesthetic experience of social media. Social media structures a gap both within the experience of social media and between social media and that of embodied experience of weather and earth. With social media, one experiences the incessant recurrence of a gap: one posts and waits. Hence, the stillness of the image in time is lost in selfie practice.

Goth Self

I have only one photograph from college. It floated up a few years ago when my mother was moving house, and I saved it out of vanity. In it, I look so lovely it's a shock to compare with how I look now, which is, at best, not terrible. That would be true for almost anyone going from age 20 to age 50. But even if that printed photograph lasts for the next 10,000 years, which it will not, I will still continue to age and will die. To believe that the image allays time is illusory. And yet this desire for permanency goes deep, back to Fayum (discussed earlier). The stillness of the image in time, then, depends on actually being seen by human beings who contemplate and remember the image.

Selfie practice, with its emphasis on repetition and numerical volume, inculcates a constant feeling that one is preserving what in fact no one has time to see. Instead, the sublime overflow of selfies submerges individual images, carrying them away as quickly as leaves fallen into a swiftly flowing river. The single photograph of which I've been writing is in a room, on a shelf. I look at it only if I'm reaching for something else on that shelf and happen to see the photograph. It is both easy to find and neglected. But for selfie practitioners the image of the self returns and vanishes over and over again, courting followers, likes, shares, and is ceaselessly pushed aside by the constant work of posting new selfies, a lost and found self.

Selfie practice negotiates the practitioner's perceived relationship to temporal frames. The reiterative act of posting new selfies structures time as staccato, and distantly felt. The disturbing connection between selfie practice and plastic surgery articulates this structure. As the natural body naturally ages, a recursive structure of time takes place where the physical mortal body is reshaped to fit the photographic frame. The picture takes on its own life.

The dream that the picture is alive reaches back to *The Castle of Otranto* and the rise of the Gothic novel.[57] Selfie practice has its roots in this pre-Romantic urge to bend time's passage. Whereas Western Medieval thought saw death and the erasure of the self from the human world as inevitable and held the self in the putative judging eye of God, when Western thought moved away from Christian belief, it threw the Western self into another vulnerability. God might not be judging you if you were a Romantic or Gothic subject, but he also wasn't bringing you into an eternal afterlife.[58] The Gothic painting that comes to life exhibits a negative afterlife, but still an afterlife that, unlike ghouls and vampires, resembles the appearance of the once-living person.

There is something deeply Gothic about selfie practice and social media.[59] An emphasis on the individual's emotion is the coin of the realm: through the hypernegation or numbing of the affect of time other emotions are exaggerated. My digital native students, despite being in their early 20s, healthy, and generally well off, express sentiments regarding the passage of time and the loss of memory that seem more appropriate for the elderly or the unwell. Fearing loss of natural memory, at an age when natural memory is strongest, and ever hyperaware of the disappearance of earlier phases of life and the vanishing of earlier friendship sets, they feel that only social media stands as a bulwark against the inevitability of losing people, losing memory, and ultimately losing oneself.[60] That temporal paradigm is the essence of the Gothic: death hangs over everything.

The paradox of selfie practice is that in its effort to numb the affect of time, it positions users' absoluteness in time's passage. The composition of the selfie resists full acknowledgment of temporally relevant events, such as broader social and political events, as its static nature of posed moments can only weakly reflect cumulative crisis across time. The embedded-in-self quality creates a temporal and imagistic fold-over, that is, an effect of doubly enclosing the individual against the embodied meaning of environmental change. As I was completing this book, the pandemic shook the world and has become particularly deeply and tragically entrenched in my own country, the United States. During this time, celebrity influencer Kim Kardashian West posted images that gave virtually no clue that they were created during a time of national crisis. Instead, the sealed hermetic space of selfies moves into oblivion. And, to be fair to well-heeled influencers, how might one create a selfie to express the pandemic

tragedy? Going into a hospital pandemic ward and snapping one's picture there would be both suicidal and morally obtuse. Depicting political resistance is nearly as difficult through selfie practice, because selfie practice demands that one hold still and keep the world around one safe and still while one creates one's pose and look. Snapping a selfie while marching in protest tends to deflect the seriousness of the act.

As I've noted, selfies can denote extreme distress. The medium is capable of reflecting immediate threat, trauma. And yet, even *in extremis* the selfie cannot convincingly broach larger realities; the individual pictures of victims do not address the problematic events that placed them in harm's way. Even the tragic hundreds of people who have died *because they were taking selfies*—pushing themselves into dangerous terrain so as to gain viewers—end up being tales about the eerie numerical sublime of selfie practice. Selfies that show their takers engaging in life-threatening tasks are enormously popular.

The aesthetics of selfie practice stem less from Renaissance traditions of self-portraiture as from Romantic notions of the human cleavage from nature. The selfie is akin to the aesthetics of a certain kind of nature imagery that stems from Romanticism and from Romantic tropes (from Caspar David Friedrich to Percy Shelley to Goethe) of the self as the observer and commander of nature.

Here, the self is placed *in contrast* to nature. The Romantic concept of nature is itself structured around a gap—the belief that we in human civilization have been cut off from nature and must access it across the gap—and art is a primary Romanticist bridge to regain access to nature. Photography, of course, stems from this cultural paradigm with its key progenitors Talbot, Daguerre, and Niépce all claiming that photographs allow nature to "paint herself."[61] Photography as a conceptual conceit to seal the gap—to suture the gap between technology and nature—retains its hold in 21st-century environmental photography.

Notably, 21st-century high-risk, death-defying selfies and 21st-century environmental degradation photography alike cement this Romanticist swerve. In such selfies and photographs, the photographer and viewer stand at a remove, unable to access nature because of its revelation as different, imperiled, or holy. Across this distance, these two forms of digital photography—selfie practice and environmental degradation images—address each other as mementos of Romanticism's shift to the idea of nature as a separate space.

Bearing in mind the inheritance of the Romanticist conception of a gap between the human and natural worlds, consider the environmentally concerned work of contemporary Canadian photographer Benjamin Von Wong. Here, Von Wong re-envisions the archetypal Friedrich scene: a man confronting the edge of ocean and land. But here, rather than the human figure standing isolated above the cliff, surveying pristine nature—from which he is separated by a gap—the human figure of the man is joined by others. As in the Friedrich image, the "wanderer's" back is to the viewer, however in the Von Wong photograph there are other people, and the fog and sea foam have been replaced by a plethora of plastic bottles. All the human figures now are below the cliff. The very important statement of the Von Wong photograph is that plastic garbage is filling our oceans. And yet, the image is not anti-Romantic but, as I've iconologically already shown, a descendent of Romanticism. The desire for the pure, the pristine, that drives environmental photography is a Romantic desire. It encounters business as usual (that is, the creation of more and more plastic despite the emergence of photographs such as Von Wong's) across a gap, between Romanticism

and capitalism. Ironically, much of the marketing of bottled water uses this same imagery, of purity and escape from the ravages of industrialization, promising us waters drawn from pristine springs inside pretty bottles.

Such photography draws on Romantic tropes of beauty to recall a time *before* we had so massively damaged our natural environment. Do we remove ourselves from the temporality of technologically enchanted life—screens that allow us to interact with images, words, and each other ceaselessly—only by, as Lauren Cornell puts it, "radical withdrawal?"[62]

Global Warming, Selfie Style

Global warming extends exponentially, as Nicholas Gallie notes.[63] As permafrost and tundra melt, they release methane, increasing the speed of warming; the melting of ice caps also increases the speed of warming. The sublime overwhelming omnipresence of global warming—that it affects the entire globe—makes it an over-the-top, impossible-to-take-in but also inescapable phenomenon. Social media practice, which foists the self into the monstrously sublime repetition of its rigid platforms, is the mirror twin of global warming. Both phenomena are urged forward by a world culture that is increasingly unable to live without the latest technological advances, and both overwhelm us with data that are too large to make immediate sense of. Both global warming and social media practice depend on a widespread mentality that refuses to give up the incessant desire for technological implements such as cars, electricity, iPhones, iPads, laptops, constant internet access, and nearly constant access to modes of travel such as planes and automobiles. The use of fossil fuels and electricity co-occurs with demands driven upward by internet use, which collectively consumes significant amounts of energy, energy often largely provided by fossil fuels.[64] That of course does not mean that selfie posting alone foments global warming. But the temporal frame of the selfie is ultimately that of the catastrophic technological sublime.

Both global warming and selfie practice, as technological epi-phenomena, are driven by the urge to interact as little as possible with the blunt natural materials of the physical world, to not have to seek and make active use of sources of energy (such as chopping wood) that require immediate physical labor; to not have to work during daylight hours and sleep in darkness; to not have to lose connection with those who are physically distant from oneself. I don't mean that these desires are unworthy. I just mean that we are not willing to part with technologies that negate or blunt the impact of the diurnal material human world, such as material distance in space or the force of diurnal and seasonal shifts.[65] Selfie sharing via social media is a kind of instantiation of identity within the rubric of the capitalist dream of time under our control.

The temporality of disavowed loss is reinforced by social media with its staccato rhythm of posts and dissociation from the embodied real. The gap between intention and effect of self-representation and the algorithmic reception of that representation manifests as the error term of our belief that social media is an agentic experience, rather than free labor creating data for social media businesses. The temporality of the selfie is different from that of photographic self-portraiture outside social media because the selfie, ineluctably part of social media, is embedded in the patterns of reading that AI performs.

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4 Numbering Identity
The Algorithmic Self

The ontological ooze of social media practice, its spillage into virtually all aspects of quotidian life, and the fact that it is *never* not time for social media make it unlike earlier media by dint of the sublime scope of its numerical, and therefore temporal, relentlessness. The experience of following or posting selfies on social media distills a feeling of sublime temporal oscillation. You never, ever, can be finished. Selfie practice continually eludes satiation. You can never post too much, because every post brings you more views, shares, or likes. This numerical relentlessness holds both for the hours of labor of social media users adding to material and commentary and for the ceaseless connection to social media users' experience.

In probing ways that selfie practice alters the temporal episteme of its practitioners, I emphasize the algorithmic gaze, that is, the effect that being seen first, last, and always by AI, has on the production of self in time for the human participant in selfie culture. In this chapter, I emphasize and unpack the disciplinary effect of numbering human value that selfie practice inculcates as it produces identity. The constant urge to *go viral* (a phrase preceding the pandemic), marks human value in the uncanny never-sold and never-not-selling landscape of selfie-world. Teaching lecture classes and colloquia on history and theory of photography at the University of Virginia for the past decade, I was moved to realize that for many of my students born in the 1990s, selfie practice functions far less as a narcissistic turn and more as a repository of social meaning, self-as-such.[1] Yet this search for meaning in the context of social media instates a numerical self.

Theologian and journalist Chris Hedges argues that in the early 21st century our identities are defined by numbers.[2] Who has the most fans, money, likes, or looks. But the numbers are never stable. If my selfie gets a million shares today, and zero tomorrow, I am effaced. To say, "Once, I had a million views," doesn't matter in selfie calculus of identity. To have a million views in 2020 and zero in 2021 is to be part of the antiquated dataset of the Wayback Machine.[3] This quantitative self supervises other modes of deciding whether one is a successful self in the era of social media. We do not ask whether a person has integrity, courage, kindness, intelligence, or even piety—whatever might be the value systems of other social worlds—for in the selfie practice of social media the only value is numerical. If your selfie posts get large numbers of likes, views, or shares, then you are a good selfie-self by the only rubric social media offers.

Selfies aren't meant to be lasting images within social media practice. They are meant for a quick glance. This speed is deeply entwined with capitalist conceptions of time, for the numbers of likes, views, and shares, in selfie practice, stand as

metaphors like net worth: numerical tracks. It is also the case that for some influencers, numerical success in likes and shares translates into actual money. Selfie practice recapitulates capitalist coding by which the only mark of success and value is numerical: who has the most likes, views, or shares is a parallel structure to the concept of valuing people solely according to who has the most money. In selfie practice, the self is always already embedded in the matrix of numerical, algorithmic seeing, as data scientist Deborah Hellman notes, bias-inherent seeing.[4] Algorithmic seeing repeats and enlarges entrenched modes of bias, such as racism and sexism.[5]

The selfie is always already the seen self: that's the entire point. The endlessly enclosing frame of selfie practice is to be seen as part of a preexisting social media matrix, part of its paradoxical erasure through visual presence.[6] This is why selfie posts are so astonishingly redundant in formal appearance. In the seamless wall-to-wall visibility of selfie practice, which is all about knowability, ever-hypervisible selfies repeat stock tropes. Images that do not repeat recognizable tropes expected of selfie images become invisible because of algorithmic sorting. The temporality of likes, followers, views, and shares is episodic but also numbingly homogenous. The episodic actions of likes, new followers, views, and shares stored as data are presented alongside the image, becoming part of the image of the selfie, congealed into its frame.

The emphasis on numerical responses makes of the selfie the ideal instrument, form, and mode of the capitalist self. Critic Shoshana Zuboff accurately calls this system "surveillance capitalism."[7] The paradox of selfie practice is its acceptance of the totalizing gaze of capitalist surveillance, not merely acquiescing but inviting surveillance by providing data streams through the work of posting one's identity on social media. This mergence with, rather than resistance to, surveillance paradoxically co-occurs along with a poignant refusal, in the sociality of normative selfie practice, to attend to the structural power of that gaze, that is, the gaze of AI that mobilizes social media platforms. It is because the algorithmic gaze restructures perception and experience of time that selfie practitioners often do not see the structure of surveillance they implicitly accept. The question of what it means to *see* is thrown into doubt by theorist Nick Bostrom's hypothesis of AI "superintelligence."[8] If machine learning can respond to images, is it actually seeing them? Inasmuch as seeing, like language, can be foundational to the constitution of the idea of a self, unpacking identity through the capacity to see provides a useful structure.

Seeing Together

Philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein makes the point that it is impossible to fully bridge what I see and what you see.[9] Imagine that you and I are walking in a garden: you see a rabbit, and say, "Look, a rabbit," but I can never be certain that my vision of the rabbit is precisely the same as yours. A photograph brings our act of seeing into some coherence: here is a picture of the rabbit in the fescue. But one also sees a photograph with different eyes than one's companion. Hence, as Wittgenstein rightly asserts, identity is vision bridged by linguistic trust. I am not you because I know for certain what I see but do not know if you see it. But if you and I largely can trust that we agree on what is that thing we call *rabbit,* we can communicate across the gap of never seeing through the same eyes. This differentiates human seeing from machine seeing. AI's

method of seeing is of the essence to selfie practice, whereas it is not crucial to self-portrait photographic practice. AI's method of seeing is pattern identification without cumulative *affective* meaning attached to what is recalled as seen, informing what is encountered anew.

Identity in selfie-practice emerges from a skewed belief in a receptive human gaze of social media. A selfie post is seen by people, yes, but the gaze of reception is something of a hybrid of AI and human gazes. For the goal of selfie practice is not the fine-grained specific, slow response of one or two people who see the image in detail and duration, but instead the AI and human combination that generates statistics: who has the largest numbers of followers, shares, and likes.

Beyond the Text

In selfie practice there is *always* something else encompassing the image and paratext of comments, views, and likes. That something else is the algorithmic gaze of AI across the image, the algorithmic gaze that is the modality and function of social media platforms, on which selfies definitely exist. Inasmuch as the algorithms managing the platforms are submerged in ways unseeable to users, and indeed must be hidden for the platforms to function, AI watching or algorithmic watching is extra-linguistic, outside the text of exchange of selfie practice. Yes, code is its own language practice, but selfie posters and selfie watchers do not intervene in the codes that drive social media platforms. The platforms are like Schrödinger's cat, inasmuch as their inaccessibility to users renders them at once dead and alive, present and absent.[10]

The time of selfie practice is neither *graphos* nor *logos*, neither before nor after utterance.[11] In selfie is not the stillness of image that we find in the self-portrait that presents to the viewer the event of the self's confrontation with the self. The selfie is temporally intermediate, moving toward and away from self-confrontation, not dwelling in it, always awaiting completion through the encompassing gaze of AI. Selfie is not *graphos*, not the completed event of inscribed language, and it is not *logos,* not the speech act of intimate representation. Selfie practice is infused with the urge of the next selfie and the previous selfie. Its seriality has no set boundaries because it is designed to be seen by the AI that runs social media platforms.

But can it rightly be said that AI "sees"? Extrapolating from philosopher John Searle's theory of what it means to speak a language, the act of seeing is human. Even computational data (the status of how many shares a post gets, for example) are not themselves perceived unless and until a person perceives them.[12] Compare a seer with a speaker: for Searle and Wittgenstein to say that language has been used, the speaker must have affective comprehension of what she speaks: what she speaks will have some embodied, affective, meaning for her.[13] Language is not only performative but also reciprocal and affective. Likewise seeing. Selfie practice is reciprocal, but only up to a point. The horizon of selfie practice is less about seeing others but rather about being seen by seeing others—going viral. The goal of identity in selfie practice is bounded by this always-elusive limit of being seen by ever-larger numbers. The fusion of human seeing with AI (algorithmic) seeing takes selfie practice further from language's essential reciprocity than are traditional photographic self-portraits. The goal of communication, via selfie, implicitly is geared toward communication with AI and, hence, at a numerical slant.

Prize Selves

In capitalism, the concept of the prize is a primary engine of selling. The conceptual structure of capitalism is the idea of *having the most*, numerically, and this idea gravitates as like-to-like to the concept of the prize winner. Prizes allow us to monetize aspects of life that might seem capable of evading capitalist competition: prizes for athletes, scholars, actors, poets, artists, journalists, scientists, mathematicians, even saints. And yet despite the proliferation of prizes into arenas that one might hope could remain independent from capitalism, most people never win. Selfie culture attends vigorously to this gap, allowing everyone who participates to feel that they can receive the prize of recognition.[14]

Against confrontation of the implicit structure of loss that is the affect of mortal time, selfie practice develops a rubric of implicit competition: who has the most followers, likes, views, and wins![15] This energy of competition within selfie practice prevents social media users from noting the structure of algorithmic gazing that undergirds the entire enterprise. What capitalism aspires to is volume—the best-selling cereal, the most popular car, the richest person. It can never offer something that is valuable in any way other than as a number, *the most*, this social code of numerical circulation.[16] If the extensive structure of prizes and the goal of recognition for its own sake are created by capitalist commercial discourse, selfie culture is capitalism's answer to its own creation: a prize circuit for identity.

Selfie practice participates in and is a prize circuit for identity; and in the practice of prizes, time is a bent horizon. You strive toward the prize and then the prize is won or not; the next year someone else gets it. You never really keep the prize because it is always at some point won by someone else. Prizes are inherently serialized; each year, a new recipient. This serialization suits capitalist discourse seamlessly. Prizes establish a code of replaceability. The temporality of the prize makes it an ideal capitalist vehicle because it feels as if it is moving beyond capitalist time structures while deepening their inculcation. Selfie practice takes it one step further in that the time when one participates in the struggle to create a numerically successful—viral—selfie is ceaseless. In selfie practice, you are always already competing for the prize of numerical ascendency—structurally speaking—regardless of individual intention in posting.

Judging Time

Marshall McLuhan, 30 years before the advent of social media, noted that "there are many people for whom 'thinking' necessarily means identifying with existing trends."[17] McLuhan seems to predict social media's praxis. And yet, there are key differences to the temporal frame of social media experience and that of earlier media outlets. McLuhan suggests as much, in that he argued that the move away from print culture to electronic media would cause a temporal collapse or meltdown, which he defined as "all-at-once-ness."[18] McLuhan feared that the electronic media of his day (he died in 1980) was "total and inclusive," but in contrast to 21st-century social media, the temporal gaps of earlier electronic media are salient. If you watched television before the advent of social media, you experienced the reach of media. But you also experienced the limits of its reach. At some point, you recognized the television doesn't know you're watching; at some point, you turned it off, having exhausted its programming. Social media is never over, and it "knows" you are there, as responses

to your posts emerge.[19] In social media selfie practice, identity is instated through a process of labor, and the sense that one accrues value through this labor is illusory but also numerically overwhelming. It is a numerical sublime to which users are continuously subjected.

The ways that numbers push social media use is breathtaking. As I write in 2020, celebrity Kylie Jenner and pop singer Ariana Grande have some 140 million and 160 million followers on Instagram, respectively. By the time this book reaches publication, those numbers will have increased, probably drastically. Jenner and Grande earn around one million American dollars for every selfie post that promotes a brand, precisely because their influence on their followers is deemed that valuable to companies selling products. Not only is the core praxis of social media the commercialization of everything—those who are called friends through social media are those to whom you can sell a product—but also the incessant commercialization of everything carries a sublime affect of limitless extensiveness.

What does it mean to have two million people think you are their friend? And yet, the appearance of selfie practice is that of openness and inclusivity endlessly, pressing against the real limit of the impossibility of such openness. This shapes the selfie-sublime. The sublime of numerical hyperextension is the sublime of social media identity. The selfie, even when you have few followers and fewer likes, tends always toward this horizon of this numerical sublime. If you are not overwhelmed with numerical sublimity—if your posts do not go viral—you have failed at social media identity practice as shaped by its platforms' engineers. I am not, of course, saying that this numerical barometer is an actual measure of the meaning of self nor that there is any easily defined definition of self to compare with the selfie. Michel Foucault argues perceptively that the nature of identity is never stable but returns to an iteration of affective meaning that is always caught up in swirls of "power and pleasure" yet does not derive entirely from those structures of social power, but rather is imbricated by these swirls of power and pleasure.[20]

But the numerical self, the selfie-self, is conceptually embedded in time differently from the nonnumerical self. The temporality of the numerical self is built of staccato fits and starts according to others' responses, and it involves a constant ceding of thought to AI as phantasm. Social media practice, selfie practice within it, foments a numerical self, as one is read as a set of numbers in social media practice, a capitalist enterprise wherein only numbers matter. If Jenner were to begin posting images that, for whatever reason, her followers disliked and they unfollowed her in droves and stopped buying what she was selling, there would be nothing left of her identity, in social media terms. She would still be wealthy because money like that doesn't evaporate in America's current system that allows the wealthy to hold onto their money. But if she lost her followers, the project of social media would no longer sustain her identity in the numerical sublime because it has to do only with numbers and no other quality.

The sublimity of very large number numbers, of pressing the construction of self into the service of numerical growth, replicates capitalist discourse—in capitalism, growth is good regardless of any other quality adherent to said growth.[21] To create identity in the way that products in capitalism are created is the trope of social media and selfie practice. Feminist theorist Judith Butler's influential claim that identity is performative extends from capitalist ideology. That is, Butler's argument regarding performativity is a reflection of how capitalism enforces the abstract self. Her philosophy, laid out in

the influential books *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter*, gives a map for how to have an identity in capitalism.[22] Extending from Butler's late 20th-century work, in selfie practice, the successful identity is that which sells, performance and purchase merging. The selfie-sublime is a negative sublime. The numbers that both drive and *are* social media are responses to images, but they are numbers stripped of substantive quality.

Nowhere Else to Go: Selfie as Limit Function

Whereas the affect of time, outside of social media, manifests in social constructs of identity with rituals that usher us through different ages or stages of life, social media selfie practice submerges the way that temporal affect imbricates identity. As Nicholas Gallie argues of the global warming sublime, social media as an experiential force is so large and overwhelming that the generation coming of age in its context is exposed to this endless feeling of the overwhelming, Burkean sublime.

Social media selfie practice curries boundlessness. Social media is inescapable and everywhere; its numbers are sublimely large and constantly on view. If you pull up Jenner's Instagram page, floating your cursor over each image tells you how many people have viewed and liked the image; one image is marked by being seen by 10 million, another, right next to it, marked as being seen by 3 million. These numbers are part of the image. Global warming, similarly, as Gallie points out, presents with a wide array of physical manifestations from which there is no escape and in which one is entirely enmeshed. Those numbers, too, are part of our experience.[23]

With social media platforms interpreted as utilities, selfie practice shifts identity into the sphere of utilities like electricity, gas, and water: that which we must have delivered to us. A cultivated need, the urge to be constantly able to access social media, is inseparable from the sublime force of social media's endless supply of new data and the eerie sense that social media *delivers to us our identity*. Whereas utilities traditionally address bodily realities such as thirst and not freezing during cold weather, mortal needs that exist regardless of how they are met, the need to post selfies and consume one's feeds from social media platforms is spurred by the enormity of the amount of data always on tap. Selfie practice in social media creates a numerical utility of self.

Social media platforms establish an implicit comparison of selfie posts, that is, the way that all posts are given numerical values regarding shares and followers, and this creates an absurd but also sublimely compelling number field in which one's identity seems to be quantified in the most crude way. It's about numbers. Social media practice shapes a capitalist sublime, a temporal horizon that seems endless. Not because the temporality of the selfie is infinite but because social media practice welds selfie practice to numbers and numbers are infinite.

Bureaucracy Online

Social media is the visual translation of bureaucracy. The bureaucratic efficiency of social media platforms is their hallmark. Posts, images, and words are corralled and controlled more efficiently than bodies in bureaucracy, but the conceptual methodology is the same. Here is the bureaucracy not of government but of capitalism. Rather than all that is solid melts into air, in social media all that is ether becomes

transient image, the image shallowed by multiplying numbers so that what is seen on the screen for a moment seems real but must be continually uploaded, posted again, commented on, shared to continue to exist. Shored up, because it cannot stand on its own. An image on a screen exists nowhere and everywhere, it is space-like and time-like but unstably moored in space-time.

Code and algorithms that produce and drive selfie practice are to social media users invisible—you don't see the tapestry's rear side but only the image itself—and yet codes and algorithms are the reality (the material substrate) of the image. The screen itself—iPhone, iPad, laptop, or whatever—does not contain the image, rather it briefly hosts it. Zuboff, building on work done by Ioanna Constantiou and Jannis Kallinikos, argues that we—inasmuch as we use social media and internet search engines—inhabit a "surveillance" economy that she calls surveillance capitalism, through which our personal likes, utterances, and actions are mined for data.[24] Notably, the temporal frame of identity as fodder for social media platform companies is "everydayness qua data imprints an intrinsic component of organizational and institutional life... and also a primary target of commercialization strategies."[25] The temporality of data collection shapes the temporal frame of identity in selfie practice. In selfie practice, we produce data and we become data. It is what we are useful for in the economy of surveillance capitalism. The willingness to proffer ourselves as image flows into the proliferation of surveillance images of us, generated by public and private surveillance cameras, including Google Street View. Clearview, a company that went public in 2019, culls selfies from social media to create facial identification databases for law enforcement.[26]

The building of identity as dataset in selfie practice is endemic. This "everydayness", as Constantiou and Kallinikos argue, of producing oneself as data is the hallmark of surveillance capitalism, a system in which our participation is pressed to become endless, hours of work.[27] Data are culled by AI, funneled into algorithms, creating what Sherry Turkle considers a disturbing mergence of human and AI identity.[28]

Everyday Data

If I suggest that selfie practice inculcates a nonagentic, numerical self, I do not argue that selfie practice suffers from a positivist lack of authenticity. Rather it suffers from a lack of autonomy. No matter what kind of selfie I take, no matter how wild a view of myself it shows, by definition it participates in two formal abdications of autonomy: (1) it presents me as a regularized image packet for others to consume and (2) it feeds me as image into algorithmic systems that operate solely and only to create profit for social media companies by serving users with the most repetitious menu of what they've already consumed.

Selfies are arguably one of the most revealing forms of data that we produce. This is so because advancing facial recognition technology is increasingly capable of tracking us on the basis of our selfie posts in ways that those who post cannot predict.[29] But my point is deeper here. By sharing our faces as data, we share an aspect of self closer to what we are than, say, by sharing what music we might like or even for whom we might vote, at a given point in time. As Hans Belting argues, the face is intrinsic to how we know each other as human.[30]

Sharing our selves as selfies day by day reshapes our sense of identity in temporality, our episteme of time. The time frame of data is different. Rather than experiencing

time in the shifting way of embodied life not transmogrified into digital data, the selfie-self, *the self as data*, is always already on view, seen, and knows itself as such, rigidly calendrical. Selfie time occurs on the horizon of the past never as depth but as extension into a flat repeating throwback space. The affect of time, in selfie practice, shallows out, overwhelmingly immanent, too large numerically to absorb.

Mutatis Mutandis

Radical dissension from the mass is negatively conditioned in social media practice because your future behavior is predicted or extrapolated from your past behavior, through the rubrics of social media platforms.[31] For the selfie-self, the swells of temporal episteme—what William Wordsworth called "spots of time" wherein meaning deepens—intensify and flatten."[32] "In this new model, populations are targets of data extraction," writes Zuboff.[33] In selfie practice, to have identity is to produce data, produce the quotidian of hypervisibility.

Before becoming the selfie-self, time moved in dips and heights. Some days deeply significant, others inconsequential. But the production of self as data that is the core urge of social media platforms, the selfie-self, makes all time shallow, homogenous. Social media platforms circulate it for the profitability of selling the capacity to target consumers, making identity both immobile and shallow, a mask. In selfie practice there are no days that have extraordinary meaning, only endless successions of faux-meaningful days, smoothed to the same level by the need to keep creating images of the self daily. This effect is produced by the constant press of what Pistor insightfully names capitalist "code."[34] The temporal curve of making the self a marketable product changes perception of the affect of time through the force of pacing. The feeling of time itself shifts around the selfie construction of self.

Hence, selfie practice inculcates a feeling of foreshortened pasts and futures, wherein very recent posts and posts just ahead bear significant meaning, with posts even a few years old already bearing terms suggesting discard—*throwback* selfies being anything that isn't brand-new—terms suggesting their useless status. The time frame of selfie practice is staccato—*post, post, comment, comment*—it is immersed in the tight frame of capitalist time, where the past must be disavowed because one cannot sell to the past.

But the future, also, is mistrusted in this capitalist selfie paradigm, because one cannot sell to the distant future, and one cannot take a selfie of one's future self; only the most immediate desires can sell capitalism's tomorrow. The selfie dose of self is structured under the implicitly punitive frame of social media's gaze that implicitly holds the individual as one to be judged. The structure of social media time does not allow the user to negotiate a pause or, more important, to navigate terms of identity that permit transcendence from the subject position of social media. Few users of social media are intimately and deeply aware of the algorithms that govern their feeds.[35] Although selfie practice is touted for quick responsiveness, even so it is mired in transaction and postponement.

The way that those human beings are folded into social media practice, through platforms such as Instagram and Facebook, renders them numerical markers. Functionally they merge with algorithmic seeing. This method of creating numbers from human beings creates a temporality specific to selfie practice in social media, one that is merged with the mechanistic. If natural memory is no longer an intrinsic

aspect of identity for the digital native, so also the parameters of self are not primarily material but bleed—in the manner of epistemic bleeding described by Maurice Merleau-Ponty—into dataset and code. There is, then, a core belief among social media users that everyone is watching everyone else, in contrast to a deep craving to keep some things secret, as is fundamental to having an embodied self (or an identity) in time.

The digital native's core belief that everyone is watching is, on the one hand, supported by the sublime metrics of social media. For each selfie posted, thousands of shares and likes emerge, multiplying the numbers so that the entire enterprise of social media selfie practice takes on a feeling of sublime expanse. As Kant makes clear, the numerical sublime is a foundation of the sublime as such. Social media feels so real because so many people have jumped into participating. It is the staring sublime, a stare of so many human gazes, and the never-turning-away gaze of AI that fill the screens of our secret lives.

Immortal Digital

The longing to become data, or digital memory, raises questions about the nature of cultural memory as such.[36] Is it memory, if it is simply code stored, the expression of which is not seen by any human being? Can identity be entirely reconfigured as that which is held in a machine unseen by human eyes and human mind?[37] The cumulative identity impulses of human beings—their posts, their images, their selfies—through social media are mostly seen by algorithms that are not human. Statistically, human views of profitable digital data are a minute fraction of algorithmic viewership.

Within that human landscape of seeing, time is staccato and structured by breaks, inasmuch as social media is utterly transactional: like my post, I'll like yours; follow me, I'll follow you. Our way of looking becomes like that of the machine: incessant, unempathetic. Looming over social media is the threat of invisibility and extinction of identity if one ceases to be visible within the algorithms that fuel the platforms. The temporality of selfie practice paradoxically always already presumes an erased self.

Selfie Ex Nihilo

The time of the selfie-self is shadowed by the belief and fear that in ceasing to post one will cease to exist, socially. Selfie practice manifests a nihilistic backdrop wherein facing another human being does not have meaning; only numerical derivative status has social force. By "facing" I mean the act of facing as described by Emmanuel Levinas: an anchor of the act of seeing and being seen as fully human, an ethical intervention into mortal time, this act of facing cannot occur through social media. Instead, images—of selfies, be they faces or belfies (that is, *butt-selfies*), of bodies—are ranked and adumbrated numerically.

This ranking and codifying into numbers—Who's posted the most selfies! Whose selfies are the most watched!—is the implicitly watching rubric of capitalism shifting our temporal frame. If we see each other in the way that Levinas describes by recognizing our shared vulnerability and mortality, temporality that holds us is fluent and consecrated, so then we have stepped out of the profane time of producing identity

for consumption.[38] Selfie practice utterly productive is the time of *getting things done* (without a sense of what is actually getting done, because it doesn't matter, it's all about the illusion of doing, circulation).

For Levinas, facing means not disavowing mortal, embodied temporality. It shapes a frame within that flow of time where desire, urge, pressing forward without a goal, are put away, and where the value and fragility of another human being are recognized. How does one *face* (in Levinas's sense of the term) a selfie? One sees the other's face, but facing, as an experience of shared vulnerability through mortal embodied time, is not compatible with Instagram Face.[39]

At the core of selfie practice, quotidian events are massaged into performances through the magic of numerical markers of social media. If I take a photograph of my baby, print it, and put in a frame, that's that. I can personally enjoy the image and people who visit my house and see the image can enjoy the image of the baby, so certainly there is an element of fertility ritual to the creation and preservation of the baby-as-image. But if I take a selfie with me and my new baby, post it, and get a million views, or even a modest thousand, I am performing in a digital show of my life. I and my child, that is. I'm not doing anything out of the ordinary—many women give birth to living children, indeed even as the growth rate of world population slows, the actual number of new babies born has increased dramatically (a larger population means that even as rate of growth slows, the actual number of births increases). So, a new baby is nothing out of the ordinary. But through selfie practice I can make it feel like a starring role. Identity becomes not something I shoulder for myself in the context of cultural traditions but rather something that is numerical: I got this many *views* for my selfie with my new baby.

It is the oneiric dream-like fold of the appearance rather than the cumulative act of authentic, sincere friendship. Sharing within capitalist dictates and governmental disciplinarity (what Foucault called governmentality) makes of social media selfie practice a vertiginous nexus in which identity is consumed but not instated. Instead it is numericalized, in contrast to embodied experience. If I walk out of my house trying to look like a middle-age, middle-class woman, there is in that act an instantiation of identity for the purpose of visual consumption. White privilege will shape my self-presentation, as I strive to look respectable so that I'm not given flack. But that's not the only thing that happens if I walk out the door of my house. I will also encounter a world that I can see and hear immediately, not waiting for a post to show it to me. Walking out the door, I am not only presenting myself, but also I am absorbing, experiencing, the world that inadvertently and somewhat randomly shows itself to me. My experience as an embodied subject walking down the street is not entirely *curated*. Charlottesville, Virginia, has a city government and planning committees, and its neighborhoods are heavily segregated. But Charlottesville is not delivered to me via algorithm.

By contrast, posting a selfie online is a controlled event, numerically curated, an effort to appear a certain way without randomness. The ideal of the selfie—that which is touted by postfeminist theory—is that you, the photographer, are in control of the image.[40] This is a conceit that begs for deeper analysis, but the simplest frame suggests that, yes, you are in control of self-presentation through the selfie in that you choose what you post. Walking down the street, you are moving through space and time and anything can happen. But what is lost in extolling the agency of selfie practice is the way that control has *already* been surrendered by simply entering

the mechanism of social media. Walking down the street I may or may not have to cede agency as a temporary tactic to survive. Participating in selfie practice, I have already given it up.

Selfie practice moves from watching a television show and, maybe, imagining that I like the actor playing the lead, to instating myself in imagination as if I were a figure in media. Through selfie practice I become a media figure competing—numerically—with everyone else creating themselves as media figures. I am creating myself as a digitized entity (on Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube) to be counted by the numbers I generate. In social media, my identity is performative, "a copy without an original."[41] Undercutting Judith Butler's dated, radical constructivist view of gender, selfie practice really *is* a copy without an original. It is a copy of a copy of a copy, a *mis en abyme* of self.

That does not mean that there is a real self in a positivist sense. Consider the notion of identity in *Genuine Pretending*.[42] Identity is created in response to power structures that make it necessary to have a self-protective public identity. But that does not mean identity is created *only* in response to power structures. Similarly, Foucault's compelling thesis of power argues that the self emerges from the nexus of social power structures that both punish and incite one to act according to what is seen by others as desirable.

Foucault's emphasis on confession is crucial here: one is compelled to confess oneself so as to create oneself, in the Foucaultian power paradigm of "spirals of desire and power" that create identity in modernity.[43] It is in the forced and therefore fabricated confessed self that capitalist power instates its torque. But that does not mean that Foucault argues there is no self outside the spiral of power and desire that shapes contemporary political structures in the developed world. On the contrary, Foucault in volumes II and III of the *History of Sexuality* extends a theory of self notably coherent with the concept of genuine pretending. The core thesis here is that there is an ontologically stable self that must be cared for. Notes Chris Hedges, "As Immanuel Kant wrote, moral autonomy is possible only through reflection, self-determination, and the courage not to cooperate."[44] Ontologically stable does not mean unchanging. It accords rather with object-oriented ontology as a locus of undetermined embodied mortal limits toward which the cultural imaginary converges.

The Empty Mirror

If selfie practice creates a temporality of gap and lack in which the practitioner is engaged in a waiting game, waiting for response to her posts, is that not just an extension of our usual experience of time, in which we are so often kept waiting for what we want? Jacques Lacan's theory of desire is the theory of desire's perpetual unfulfillment.[45] In structuring the vanishing point of never-met desire that Lacan argues is the foundation of identity formation, he contends that we all perpetually try to move toward an idea of something we think we must have that, in fact, we have largely imagined we want and that we will never reach and never attain. This constitutive longing is not the same as needing food, shelter, freedom from grinding poverty, or good health. Rather as vanishing points structure visual images, Lacan argues that that which we desire and never reach structures our identity. It is the way of our desire, "eternally extending toward the desire for something else," that makes us what we are.[46]

For Lacan, the object of desire represents something we feel we have lost, and cannot again attain, that we believe is essential to our identity. But in the end, he is really theorizing time. If I regret that I did not become a competitive middle-distance runner after college, precisely what I regret is that I cannot go back to being 22 years old and make a different choice. If I could go back, there would be no reason to mourn the loss.

Even so, the core of his argument, that we organize our lives toward what we cannot attain, is an insightful interpretation of identity in capitalism.[47] In capitalist systems, what we do not have is what we believe we must have. As Thomas Piketty eloquently argues, the vast majority of capital is held by an exceedingly small number of people. Most of us, human dwellers of planet Earth, have little or no wealth in capitalist terms. Enter the selfie.

In selfie world, magically one's selfie-self becomes the object one seeks. The desire is to reproduce oneself over and over to repeatedly allay the knowledge of one's mortal singularity (that is, one's limits). Selfie practice, unlike self-portraiture, does not find the place of signification as the self containing its own fracture in time, but instead it incessantly places *with the other* the claim on which identity is founded.[48] This vanishing point—or never-reached limit—of longing is positioned temporally ahead of the present, a future tense luring us forward with impossible goals of satiation, wholeness, and completion.

Making the Cut

For Lacan, the emergence of the self as a self occurs when visuality and tactility are separated. The mirror stage, he argues, is that phase of infant development wherein the young child realizes that she is seen by others as another and hence begins to codify herself—and, importantly, other human beings such as her mother—as signs, emblems, and symbols. This cut of the symbolic is where what Lacan argues is the plenitude of touch (the mother's breast, her milk, her body) is taken away and replaced by the never entirely fulfilled desire of the scopic regime (seeing). Seeing symbolically involves seeing oneself as an object among objects, seeing oneself as one appears to others as an image, a sign, an emblem. The mirror stage is connected to the gesture of the selfie, that of staging the self as a sign, an emblem. But the banality of the selfie overtakes the possibility of separation; it persists at the edge where one is never separated from the fantasized other, attempting to see oneself in time without realizing oneself is the body already wearing time.

Cut for Time

If the signature of the selfie is a ritualized mask multiplied numerically, the field of social media is a hybridized social space, at once open and porous and closed and contentious. Its essential nature is that of a numeric field. The selfie recreates the self as emblem, a lost image striving for fullness. But with somewhere around 90 million selfies posted per day, it is a numerical curve that erases each face through multiplication. Even if you take multiple selfies a day, your selfie-self is flashed out in cuts of time and becomes functionally unseen in the numerically sublime flow of images. The self that is *not* caught by selfies is the self of continual time and the self of mortal time. If I take three selfies today, one at midday and two in the afternoon, those

images are punctures or fragments of the day. But my actual embodied self will inevitably have moved through time without cuts or stops, regardless of what the day has held. Maybe I spent an hour outdoors watching snow fall, feeling that time moved smoothly, without tear. Or, maybe I spent the day in upsetting, pointless meetings. Maybe that day felt fragmented and torn. But my embodied mind moved through the time without pause even so. The temporal skew of the selfie occurs because, as Rögnvaldur Ingthorsson notes of time theory generally, it is based on a nondisclosed metaphysics.[49] The metaphysics of selfie moves temporality into the realm of the strictly quantitative.

Performances

If identity is ascetic and dispositional, then selfie practice alters temporal identity. Selfie practice, by creating a performative self that stands for the ascetic or dispositional self and by constantly absorbing the embodied self's place in time, instates a temporal episteme of nonconfrontation with teleology. The idea of a wholly performative self, put forward by Judith Butler in the late 20th century, is a misprision of Foucault's theory of power and pleasure in sociality and a misprision of Bourdieu's theory of dispositionality and habitus.

Foucault does not argue identity as primarily performative. Rather he is rightly understood to extend the Kantian tradition of self-knowledge through contemplation. Ascesis for Foucault means a stripping back to the self; in this idea of caring for one's identity by self-emptying of the other, he posits a core identity across and through which sociality works.[50] Theories of identity as entirely performative imply that selfie practice does not qualitatively alter identity. We are all always already performative all the time, in this view, and selfie only articulates that reality. But only if the self is *not* wholly performative.

For performativity as a sole rubric of identity emerges conceptually from capitalist ideologies of desire. If I can create a photographically and computer-generated performance of myself that is lovelier and more numerically noted than my embodied self, why not? This alias self can offer me shallow affective shelter that I cannot get in my embodied life. In some ways, even without trying to create an alternate internet persona, I have done so. The selfie, to be sure, may be an attempt to wrest a feeling of control from a system of surveillance that becomes all-encroaching. Google my name, Claire Raymond, and a photograph taken 5 years ago pops up, culled from a publisher's website through Google's algorithm. I don't look like this now, but the internet mask persists as ghost. I gave the publisher the photograph understanding that it would be on a website, but maybe not appreciating the way that Google grabs image data and drags them to the endless surface. The *why not* may be that understanding oneself as surface data allows one to be understood as surface data.

Even so, selfie practice is uncannily infused with tropes of sincerity. The selfie-self is, as noted, an extension of a performative self, but selfies take 20th-century theory of performativity further. The selfie-self promises leaving behind the weight and pain of embodiment entirely. The constructed nature of identity under the law that upholds capitalist structures creates discontinuous identities, including the nonsensical notion of the "illegal" person or the person who bodily exists in a national space but is considered before the law not to exist. And yet, as Foucault makes

clear, we are often the effect of discontinuities. As Foucault elucidates, people move between state boundaries and the clearly defined citizen of one place is often a defunct paradigm.[51]

The selfie depends on implicitly capitalist-political notions of self. I certainly do not mean that all individual selfie posters are right wing. What I mean is that the selfie-self depends on the same notion of self making as circulates in right-wing myths, Ayn Rand's fantasy of self-determination.[52] From this background, the emergence of selfie culture gives an eerie shimmer of materiality and immateriality to the self, concretizing as number and also flattening the self. Selfie then is not presented as an alias but as that most authentic self, the *documented* self, the numerical self. It parallels the increasingly structured self of nationalistic discourse.

Hans Belting argues that image not only substitutes for body or embodied interaction but also opens a space of encounter that is stiller and more permanent than embodied interaction. The image world is a haunted one, echoing through memory and time. It drags at time's pace, always, but the selfie folds this down to numbers: images are lodged in banal settings of views and likes, the picture immersed in rubrics of quantity.

Selfie culture emerges from a social space of high literacy rates. To post a selfie you need to be able to read and write. Even so, the image becomes a wordless grid through which the self is folded down to a numerical sign. The selfie presents the quotidian surface of makeup, clothes, immediate surroundings. It ascribes to the idea that all we have is the surface, the quantitative summation of surfaces. In this ideology, the surface *is* the real and so its revelation is not an invasion but a translation.

Aesthetic Stillness, Selfie as Flow

For Arthur Schopenhauer, the key of aesthetic experience is a sense of time stopping.[53] Schopenhauer specifies that affective pain is caused by the energy of desire and contends that works of art can move into the space of desire, temporarily freezing the constant will to have one's desires met and that this stillness defines aesthetic value. But cessation of the desire to acquire is decidedly *not* the temporality of social media. In selfie practice, the continuous event of inhabiting the image feed is an experience of gap, not a gap in time but a time of gap, rather an aesthetic-temporal space where nothing is except the staccato, visual plink of post, response, post, response.

The skewed temporality of selfie practice inheres in the reiteration of the self in a controlled environment: that is, you the selfie poster do not control social media platform algorithms, social media companies do. You do not control others' responses to you on social media. Given that photographic filters—editing apps—cause frequent selfie takers to seek plastic surgery that makes manifest what the app does to their look, we may discern that selfie takers and posters do not actually feel in control of the image but, on the contrary, are controlled *by* the image.[54] The image becomes dictatorial, recursively, in social media selfie practice.

In selfie practice, agency in time is altered. In selfie practice, I am not the woman who moves through space and time, seeing and listening and receiving knowledge of what I see and hear. Instead, I am the woman who looks a certain way in a specific set of images that I create as a substitute for myself. This is a key difference between self-portrait and selfie. Self-portrait stages a confrontation: the self seeing the self. Selfie stages a presentation: the self being shown by the self. The self is not a seeing

self in the selfie, it is a being-seen self. It is the self as an accretion, a numerical folding pattern.

Different from a photographic self-portrait, the temporality of the selfie is defined by the ever-present force of the present as the only valuable time. The idea of the throwback indicates already the devalued space of even recent history in selfie discourse. Only the present matters because one's presentation of self is only as powerful as it is current. If I have a photograph taken five years ago in which I got a thousand views, that has no bearing on now. The selfie is vertiginously conscripted to looking like oneself but not oneself when tired or, worse, old—that is, not oneself from whom others might look away, decreasing numbers of views.

The selfie paradigm is an advertisement paradigm. Even if my selfie has nothing overtly to do with selling anything, the paradigm is of entering identity into an eerie, incessantly slipping and rejoining nodus of others' gazes. Hence it is the perfect medium for selling cosmetics. Once my image goes onto Instagram, it moves through the paradigm of self as image-product and into algorithms that sort my image for its probable desirability to others. Because social media algorithms work as extensions of advertising opportunities, they seek to *feed* social media users on the basis of previous patterns of media consumption. The verb *feed* suggests feeding a baby; when speaking of adults, we typically use words like meal or dine, not *feed*.

In keeping with dictatorial control of temporality, photo apps tend to create features that might be considered stereotypically white.[55] To be sure, there is no such thing as a white facial structure because, as James Baldwin long ago made clear, whiteness itself is a socially fabricated category.[56] But we have created that category, and social media emphasizes it. Social media's urge toward regularizing how people look moves from the racialized sphere of real space, wherein segregation remains the dominant trope of the developed world, into the space of visual discipline. Its violence inheres in the submersion of social media algorithms, by which the experience of selfie discourse appears to be just *there*. But what is there is what is placed before the user by algorithms that enact violence precisely through their encoded repetition of acculturated racist patterns of seeing human faces. The algorithm appears to be unbiased but is heavily biased, in its foundation. Beyond this racist torque, the violence of social media that haunts the user is the knowledge that wherever one goes one is aware of the other self, the posted self. This incessant scopic regime presses further into core ideas about identity than do other media (movies, magazines, television).

Selfie's tie to AI frames identity as numbers, inasmuch as the algorithms that *feed* us social media are forms of AI, and what AI cannot do is know through embodied affect. Mathematician Cathy O'Neil offers this analogy: a child who touches a hot stove instantly learns, and needs only the one lesson, that her hand is burned when she touches that surface.[57] That is because she feels. An AI model can learn something comparable—do not press an unguarded human hand against extremely hot surfaces—but it will learn through gathering large amounts of data funneled to this point, not through noting narrowly bound cause and effect. AI learns differently from a human being because there is no embodied-affect-mortality effect in AI. AI learns shallow and wide; mortal embodied humans learn deep and narrow. What a human being learns, or for that matter sentient animals, is experienced through this path: embodied-affect-mortality. Affect, the extension of the embodied temporal episteme, is never absent from human learning.

Selfies, produced by human beings, are circulated through AI, and so the banal lesson of selfie is numerical—large amounts of data, large numbers. Consider Searle's classic work on the question of whether machines understand languages that they are able to produce.[58] A similar argument can be applied to the question of how machines learn to see. To suggest that a machine comprehends what it sees is to misrecognize the definition of the machine: for machine seeing is only a process of recognizing patterns rather than a processual aggregation of unset, always shifting and unsettled, boundaries of nuance, trace, implication, and connotation, including pattern. Machines cannot comprehend in an affective, grasping sense, endlessly shifting connotations of what they see, but they can *match* almost infinitely.

If I (a human being) see a rabbit in the yard, a web of associations arise with the recognition: *there is a rabbit in the yard*. Associations with Easter, trepidation of wild animals as disease carriers, memory of Albrecht Dürer's *Feldhase*, as well as associations with the meaning of yard, the linguistic turn of translating the image into a word, and the trace echo of other languages in which I know the word for this creature arise in me.[59] Each time I see a rabbit in the yard, the same connotative subtext will *not* be repeated; as I move through time and space, the meaning of any and every given object and event changes. The next time I see a rabbit in the yard, maybe the rabbit standing under a tree as lightning flashes elicits a quasi-maternal concern for the animal's safety. By contrast, if a computer is trained to recognize the image of a rabbit, it will do that. But trace meanings of affective, associative, and densely built connotative submeanings around the nexus of rabbit are not part of AI's capacity to see. Selfies, created to be seen by AI, are created to be seen but *not* created to be interpreted. Selfies are created to be viewed but not contemplated.

Suppressing Time, by the Numbers

The circumstance of social media's temporal aporia, then, is not whether viewing selfies is a high or low aesthetic experience but that such viewing is defined by eliding embodied time's episteme; in particular, knowledge of our labor in creating social media data is suppressed. That is, as we participate in social media, we labor to build data for social media companies to sell.[60]

There is then of social media a constitutive gap, not only aesthetic—not only perceptual without explicitly being confessed—but rather also processual. We are all part of the hive mind, but most of us don't conceive the webbing of AI that builds the hive into which we insert ourselves in selfie practice.[61] We may not directly experience that our social media activity is giving free labor to social media companies, which use our data as profit source, but we do have the sense that something larger is watching us. This larger gaze is not mystical, permanent, or stable; it is capitalist technology turning human interaction into numerical data for profit. It is the gaze of AI used for capitalist gain.

This aporia is summarized by one young woman who states that, in social media, "you want to create your own personal brand but you end up making a mess."[62] The messiness of representing the self through social media stems from the skewed temporal episteme that holds selfie practice: the temporality of speed is also the temporality of waiting, that is, the temporality of speed ricocheting within social media's hollow gaps. This suffering (patience) is captured in the folding nets of numerical data—the data we see and become through social media. Numerical identity that

is definitive of selfie practice can seem to be part of a hive mind that buzzes with our shared neurological sparks, but the connective tissue of AI alters the equation. Identity by the numbers means a shift in the experience of time for selfie practitioners whereby identity is absorbed into the rubric of ratings and our core structure for self-manifestation is a digitized template of what once was called *TV Guide*.

Notes

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5 Archive, Memory, Identity

The word *archive* derives from the Greek *ἀρχή*, meaning *ancient, of the origin, the first*.[1] The archive is not in its essence the public documentation of events but rather the place marking the origins of events.[2] The archive is not—as social media companies want us to believe—a place where every image is held. One might say it is the depth material trace of the sociohistoric self. Ann Cvetkovich's thesis of emotion and archive intends a depth of emotion that social media cannot present in itself.[3] Social media is not the ancient, nor the original; rather it is an incidental repository, on the surface that Nicholas Carr calls the "shallows."[4]

Developing from Carr's metaphor of surface, I suggest that selfies are the self-portrait that is not haunted by history. Selfies on social media, while not haunted, *can* haunt. The selfies of those no longer living haunt the survivors of the deceased, a space wherein the deceased continue to exist, as virtual images, referred to by Facebook and Instagram as *memorialized* accounts.[5] Because the haunting capacity of selfie practice hovers between its immediacy—the dead person's selfies are still there—and its status as the possession of a social media platform company, selfies on social media platforms are neither object nor subject. Such images are not the possessions of social media users but rather in the control ultimately of social media companies. They are vulnerable to social media's skewed and distorted temporality. They can disappear quickly. When my grandmother died, age 101 and not a social media user herself, one of her grandchildren posted on Facebook a scanned photograph of my grandmother as a teenager. That seemed to memorialize her. And yet now, just a few years later, the print photograph is the archive. The Facebook post is for all intents and purposes invisible in the flow of image-time that is social media practice. It also technically is in the control of Facebook, whereas the print is in a desk drawer, still too emotive to be framed and displayed.

Archive is the drawer of emotion. Its time is the time of holding and knowing, often with pain, the distance of the origin in the self. Archive is the container of a temporality of origin encoded, embedded, inextricably bound up with time's cut, time's fragmentary press. Archive, then, is not the sealed place of performance but the wound of temporality, the admission and avowal of time's hold. Archival time is the time of emotion but more fundamentally it is the time of origin, which means the loss at the origin, and the loss that is the origin: as origin in archive always implies loss, because the concept of archive implies distance from the origin. To go deeper into these questions of self imaging, archive, and memory, I turn to Mohawk Bay

of Quinte photographer Shelley Niro, whose self-portraiture is also discussed in chapter 8 of this book.

Originals

Niro's haunting series of self-portrait photographs, *Abnormally Aboriginal*, confronts colonialist ideologies of origin and cultural memory (figures 5.1, 5.2, and 5.3). The wordplay of the photographic series turns on the ideas of normalcy and origin, in the context of colonization. For Niro, the term *origin* is linked with white people's colonialist word *aboriginal*, applied to indigenous peoples of the Americas and Australia. The word *original,* of course, is included in the term *aboriginal*, or *from the origin*. Niro's triptych self-portrait, *Abnormally Aboriginal*, plays on the idea of whites having the hubris to assign to indigenous peoples the term *origin*, evoking the long history of varying terms whites have applied to indigenous Americans, most of which are derogatory and some of which are still in circulation as names of national sports teams.

The origin, the *arche*, or archive, is a wound in Niro's use of the term. For the idea of naming indigenous Americans as the *original* peoples of the Americas is itself a fold of colonization. It indicates that someone came after and took possession away

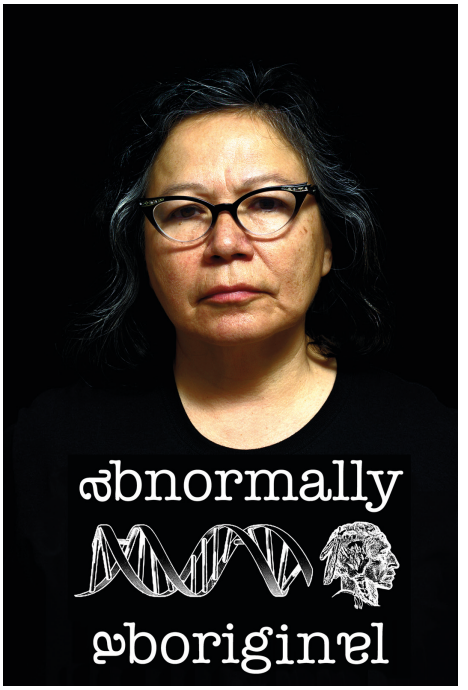

Figure 5.1 Shelley Niro, *Abnormally Aboriginal*, 2014/2017, inkjet printed on canvas, 54 × 34 in. Courtesy of the artist.

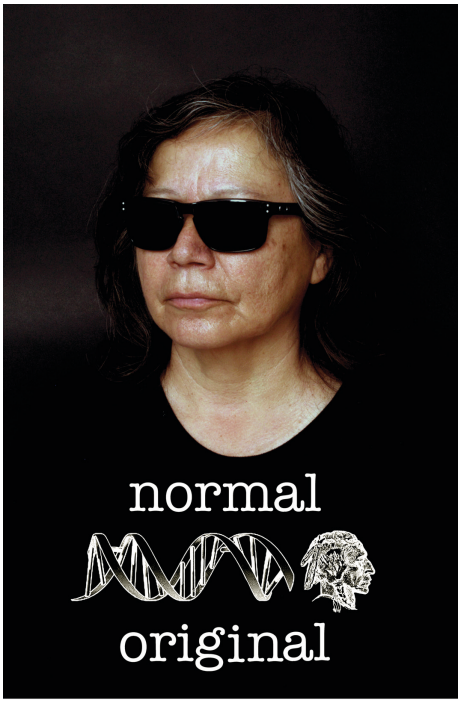

Figure 5.2 Shelley Niro, *Abnormally Aboriginal*, 2014/2017, inkjet printed on canvas, 54 × 34 in. Courtesy of the artist.

from the original. The idea of origin bleeds into the archaic, the nonrecuperable time before the origin was seen as origin, before its ending gave it the name of origin. Niro's triptych self-portrait, then, is not merely commenting on racist nomenclature for indigenous Americans but goes deeper. Her use of word and visual text is deeply entwined, as is the symbol for human DNA that articulates the series' final frame, when she has removed her glasses.

Niro deconstructs the mytheme of origin in this self-portrait triptych.[6] For what is the American archive for indigenous Americans? Is it, as Mick Gidley lays bare, images and artifacts gathered by whites as trophies of conquest?[7] Is it objects taken into custody in white-run museums? Consider Marge Bruchac's work on reanimating vivid indigenous possessions that have been killed, so to speak, in the archives of white-run and -owned museums.[8] The archive, then, of white possession of indigenous objects and photographs of indigenous peoples is a place of origin *not* for indigenous people's history but rather of the history of white conquest and colonization of indigenous American lands and sacred objects.

Niro's photographs interrogate notions of origin in this frame of racial and ethnic violence, indeed, of genocide. Niro points to the idea of an "aboriginal" person as a fabrication of white racist violence and naming. Every human being is of course aboriginal to somewhere. The offensive colonialist idea that "aboriginal" peoples are "abnormal" Niro draws from deep reserves of white "research" fabricating theories

Figure 5.3 Shelley Niro, *Abnormally Aboriginal*, 2014/2017, inkjet printed on canvas, 54 × 34 in. Courtesy of the artist.

of the minds, bodies, and societies of colonized indigenous peoples.[9] It was long the argument of white colonizers that indigenous Americans should be sacrificed for the supposed greater good of the goal of creating the United States. Hence, the "aboriginal" and the "abnormal" were fused in colonization's discursive violence (as well as its literal physical violence). Niro takes apart this ideological fusion, picturing instead herself as a "Normal Original," a sovereign self, wearing dark glasses, looking askance at white nomenclature, with its hubristic belief in being correct in deciding who is normal and who is not.

The use of glasses, prosthetics of vision, is crucial to Niro's self-portrait triptych. She asks, what does it mean to see oneself through lenses given to one by one's violators? What does it mean to reject those lenses, and see oneself anew? The archive that whites create through keeping records of colonialist violence is also a history of colonization that Niro deconstructs. For her, the origin is in the living bodies, minds, and spiritual practices of indigenous Americans, including herself, her own body. Niro's self-portrait, here, is an act of visual decolonization, deploying the still photograph's capacity to frame identity in time.

The photographic self-portrait, the trace of the embodied self, facing the embodied self, invokes vertigo. "I am photographed" and "I see myself seeing myself" are parallel conditions, parallel structures.[10] I am photographed, that is, the sky and sunlight press down and define my outlines, a lone body set against the sky (even if I'm indoors

or on a plane, I'm still a body defined against light inasmuch as I carry my and only my mortality in this skin). I am photographed: light writes itself along me, defining my limits, my embodied mortal space in time. The distortion of self-seeing Lacan describes as an anamorphosis, a moment of recognizing the uncanny way that perception of identity is both an interior and an exterior event.[11] I perceive both within myself (as a bounded psychical unit bearing perceptions that are never automatically known to others but can be conveyed to others) and outside myself (as an embodied entity the limits of which I know by externalization, e.g., seeing my hands).[12] Seeing my hands touch the computer keyboard, I feel the keys and also see my hands move across them. I could look at someone else's hands make similar motions but would be unable to feel what their fingertips feel. I see as myself and as an ecstatic (outside the body) observer of myself.

Mirroring

The distortion of this mirrored moment is intrinsic to the sense of identity as being both total (I am myself only; I am not you nor any other) and always already emergent into the world (if literally all I know is that I exist, then I am nothing). The photographic self-portrait is a kind of setting still of the realization that one is and is not an entity, bounded but never wholly so. Time's episteme is the limit that sets apart in an ineradicable way actions from perception. (I can perceive actions but I can also remember actions; however, I cannot completely repeat actions in time.) The self-portrait photograph is not simply looking in the mirror in front of a future audience (those who later view the self-portrait). It is looking in the mirror with time at your shoulder. The selfie, by contrast, is immersed in the frame of social media, never directly confronting its own status as image but always already mediated by its position within the fold of social media.

When Niro, in her triptych self-portrait, photographs herself wearing T-shirts emblazoned with words deconstructing white colonialist racism, she confronts also her own body in its temporal frame. The time of colonization, as Johannes Fabian argues in *Time and the Other*, is a construct that puts in place the false belief—a differential power system rather than a factual system—that white European colonialist time is the only real time, the only grid along which to accurately view history.[13] The idea of Western time is itself a tool of colonization, and, notes Fabian, it is the most thoroughgoing form of discursive colonization by which Western powers implement longstanding control over non-Western colonized peoples. Western time is not a discovery of the reality of time but rather a cultural creation, in which all world events are interpreted to lead toward Western domination. Niro's self-portrait contests this ideological structure of time.

Niro's visual contestation of Western time takes place across the image of Niro herself, her temporal frame as a finite mortal subject. The idea of "origin" here, as pinned down through white nomenclature identifying "Others," Niro's self-portrait triptych takes apart. Instead, she suggests her own indigenous idea of origin, that is, *her* normal temporality. This normal includes her human body in its mortal pace of time. Niro is not, of course, anti-Modern. She is a modern subject, with T-shirt, glasses, DNA helix, a digital photographer and multimedia artist comfortable in cutting-edge visual technologies. But she refuses to be seen through the lens of Western time, that is, through the lens that decides "aboriginal" peoples are a kind of archive of the human

(that is, an archaic example of the human), a false front long touted by Western anthropology.[14]

The archaic, the putative national archive of conquest, is the space that Niro refuses to occupy. She is not *from* the origin (aboriginal), rather she *is* an original, an individual, herself. As an indigenous American, Niro contests her symbolic place within the view of white settler culture that casts nonwhites generally and indigenous peoples specifically as somehow ancient, before the arrival of what is seen by colonialist time as the fulfilment of linear history—white, Western domination.

Niro uses image and language juxtaposed to make her point. We see Niro in the images wearing a black T-shirt that states, as shown in figure 5.1, *Abnormally Aboriginal*, and in figure 5.2, *Normal Original*, and finally no words—only the twined helix of DNA. Niro contests the colonialist gaze, the gaze by which Western peoples came to the continent of America and dispossessed indigenous Americans of their land. Niro's contesting gaze, above the elocution of the T-shirts, accosts the viewer. In the first image, she pokes fun at the shifting nomenclature whites have given indigenous peoples. In the final image, she gives the audience a look of, *Come on! See me as I am.* The feminist force of the self-portrait, here, is its refusal of colonialist ways of seeing, which historically emerge from and merge with masculinist tropes of domination and dominion, coupled with the forthright presentation of Niro, in her late fifties when the pictures were made, as a middle-aged woman who makes no bones about it. Her gaze is sharp. Her gaze meets ours and also meets herself (as it is a self-portrait). It is a challenging gaze, challenging us to see her anew, as a human being, original in herself.

Delays, Lapses

The self-portrait has an eerie, lapsed relationship to time because identity itself is strangely set in time. The time of the self is delayed and belated and also premature—I come after my ancestors, arrive into my family of origin only to be displaced as a link to the next generation. I arrive, as a recognizable self, before the formation of myself as a manifestation can be fully marked. The time of the self is never whole or complete. Hence a self-portrait looks toward its own absorption in culture. For Niro, her own culture—Bay of Quinte Mohawk, Six Nations—is that which is normal, original, to her. The temporality of colonization structures a violent formation, because it is structured by assuming that all human cultures and all life on planet Earth move toward Western domination and the clinical gaze that believes it alone knows reality.[15]

Against this violative colonialist time, Niro asserts a human time, the time of her people who are not named by others but named by and for themselves. Indigenous time is not mystical ritual time, even as ritual is a crucial function of any society that holds anything sacred; rather it is time without the violent urge toward and absolute faith in domination of all those outside this culture. That does not mean that Bay of Quinte Mohawk do not believe in the passage of time; rather it means that Niro's culture does not interpret time as a progressive march toward Western capitalist structures such as cities, prisons, and highways.

The Christological idea of Messianic time, the belief in a time when the world ends and is remade, flows with colonialist time (and indeed, egregiously wrong ideas of Christianity were used as a genocidal cudgel against indigenous Americans).[16] As Derek Sayer makes clear, the idea of productive time surfaces in Max Weber's theory

of the Protestant work ethic.[17] My contention is that social media temporality generally and selfie temporality in particular visually and experientially stem from capitalist notions of time, from capitalist temporal structures, the urge to be productive. In this context, no generation moves deeper into capitalist time than those now, in 2020, reaching their late teens and early twenties. This is the generation whom I have spent the past decade teaching courses in art history and media studies at a university in the American Southeast. Through my students' original words and fresh comments and insights, through their openness to sharing (an openness inculcated probably in the very context of social media practice), this generation has profoundly shaped this book. It is to my students that I turn here.

Digitalia

The phrase *digital native*, referring to those born around the turn of the 21st century, is telling. For habitual selfie practitioners, the digitization of data, including old selfie posts, is not a stale form of self-expression, flotsam and jetsam held in capitalist-driven and capitalist-determined databases. For this generation, the selfie, or self-as-data, is *the* home place. It holds that structure of feeling that we call identity. Social media and its storage of selfies is the memory palace of younger Millennials and upcoming Gen Z.[18]

A student, born just before the turn of century, in class discussion stated without irony that "unless the sun crashes into the earth and explodes everything," social media data will be permanently preserved.[19] Social media posts and comments become the eye of God for people born around the year 2000. No one can predict the future, and digital data stored in physical machines that are vulnerable to environmental catastrophe, war, and economic crisis *may* last forever. But it seems unlikely.

When this student made the striking claim that only the sun crashing into the earth would delete social media data, my first suggestion was that economic, environmental, and political factors far less dire than the extinction of the planet as such could cause data loss and deletions. But maybe more to the point: who's watching anyway? Who looks back at selfies taken ten years ago by a random teenager in Boise, Idaho? Or Chennai? That answer is clear: no one except the teen, now in his twenties, seeking a sense of self in the uneasy image repertoire controlled by social media companies. Very possibly when the teen posted said selfie, views flooded in, but 10 years later, it's old news. In the end, no one's really looking back on social media. Even influencers who earn significant money posting selfies have a short shelf life, with hot products from a year ago no longer desirable.

In social media, the experience of time is compressed, intensified, and also numbed and nullified. The immediate image and its evanescence is so voluminous that with so many posts, so many selfies, so many likes, so many shares, and so many followers the past is reduced to irrelevance; it is data-saved rubble. The archive crumbles without dust.

Mnemonic Structures

As noted in my introduction, whereas Gaston Bachelard contends that physical spaces—in particular the first house where one lives, the house of one's infancy or childhood—hold and structure one's symbolic sense of self, for digital natives the

house of self is social media, held in digital data.[20] But digital data are unlikely to last as long as, say, stone masks.[21] The stability of that digital data that are old selfie posts depends on whether and for how long social media companies consider it profitable to hold onto data of the selfies of most of their users. While the selfie is digitized data and not a material object, the gaze of users on social media platforms is not disembodied; users' human looking occurs in space and time.[22] But young users' fidelity in social media as a salvific point of stability is an eerie and haunting belief that somehow being held *by social media as such* is memory.

Digital data are not stored in a deity's immortal mind. Cloud data are a metaphor; the data are not in a cloud, they are in computers but just not your computer. Because such data centers, computer banks, use energy at an alarmingly high rate, they are vulnerable to any development, such as bad weather or wars, that might curtail electricity supply. But for digital natives, the idea of social media as a lossless gaze feeds into young users' sense that their posted selfie faces will be recalled forever and that, conversely, and terrifyingly, they will be forgotten if they do not post selfie images. Selfies are not about the pleasure of seeing oneself—which defines narcissism—but rather a frightful feeling that if one's image is not posted oneself will disappear, vanish, and fall into erasure. Social media sells the numbing of the affect of time, yes, but it also sells its inverse, a fear-based incentive to keep your image out there lest you vanish.

My digital native students' faith that social media would, no matter what, preserve the memory of their lives haunted me. Their faith in social media as a support to their identities, a safe space for their lives as archive, was immanently poignant. They expressed the faith that no previous generation had the capacity to be remembered outside the natural life span (ignoring books, paintings, buildings, and the apparatus of what we might call history). In this, even so, they're largely correct: most people's lives have been entirely forgotten. And yet, within the students' belief in the power of social media are key assumptions that have deep implications for a new notion of identity in temporality.

First is the belief that memory (constitutive of identity) inheres not primarily in your mind, nor in what other people hold in their minds, nor in objects that you keep, but rather *in your digital archive*. One makes the assumption that one's identity—which emerges through the continuous process of recollection—is radically outside oneself and also not primarily held in the memories of other human beings but instead is a dataset. A dataset that is the property of a social media company. This radical act of trust makes sense only if one sees the social media company as a benevolent, God-like source viewing and preserving her identity. And so, the second shift in identity involves obeisance to the digital dataset as more real than any other act or site of cultural and personal memory.[23]

Selfie practice intimates and imitates archival practices. For inasmuch as the selfie is posted frequently, following the arc of the poster's biological continued existence, it makes a kind a of happenstance archive.[24] Archives, outside of social media, comprise texts and objects that have meaning in part because they are culled from a wealth of other, less meaningful texts and objects.[25] An archive is a purposive mnemonic horde. The number of selfies posted each day approaches 100 million. Is this an archive?

The Internet Loves You

The simulacrum of eerie invulnerability that digital archives project is paradoxical.[26] As Cvetkovich argues, archives of feeling are crucial historical documents. Selfie posts

are sites of feeling for the people who participate in them. Derek Conrad Murray elegantly describes the self-reflexive character of selfie practice.[27] Selfies fitting into matrices of social worlds ask emotively that their subjects be *seen*, and yet being remembered, in selfie world, is at once part of the praxis and an evasive moment.

The reverence and devotion that my students in contemporary photography courses at the University of Virginia, taught between 2014 and 2020, expressed regarding their social media time lines, past selfie posts, and memory records on social media were strikingly urgent.[28] They felt that their era—the era of social media—alone of all times in human history was saved because only their era salvaged extensive documentation of the minutiae of their lives in digitized data of social media platforms. In one remarkable class discussion, I mentioned that I had saved only one photograph from my time in college (other photographs were taken, but as it happened I didn't save them, only the one image), and the students expressed amazement that I could *live* without this documentation. Even for my generation saving only one photograph from college is unusual. But I remember much of my time at Yale with searing clarity. A traumatic and also uncannily beautiful time and place, I remember it so clearly that photographs would add little to or even detract from my remembrance. To my students the idea of having a memory palace in one's mind was meaningless. For most of them, memory is what social media stores. Without social media's data storage, one is in the dark ages.

If the practice of selfie posting inculcates in its users a haunting mistrust of natural memory, this mistrust buttresses how social media companies sell the numbing of the affect of time.[29] Social media posts including old selfies were a subject of intense and surprisingly mournful nostalgia for many of the students—as expressed in class discussions and writing responses—I taught. Born in the last years of the 20th century, the typical student at the university where I teach would be aptly described as privileged, by dint of parental income and inherited cultural capital. These privileged young people expressed vehemence of nostalgia attached to old social media posts and concomitant fear of losing the past if one were to lose one's old posts. It was moving to realize the sincerity of emotion attached to social media's digital archives for digital natives. These were not people to whom one would instinctively impute strong feelings of nostalgia insofar as they were at the beginning of their lives, not the end, nor would one expect such strong fears of loss, as they were of a social class that would seem to have lost very little, materially at least. And yet the practice of social media, including the frequent posting of selfies that a student insightfully described as a *habit* rather than an *act*, inculcated a profound and thoroughgoing feeling of looking back, looking at the past, always, even though one was so young as to barely have a past.

The experience of hearing, over the past several years, from these young Millennial and old Gen Z students that their entire dream house was social media has had a haunting effect on me. I cannot unknow the way that social media platforms have colonized the realm of *nostos*—longing for home—for this generation. Selfie practice moves toward the desired place of a fully acknowledged, safely home self, as a form of identity shaped and marketed by social media. Here, the numbing of the affect of time occurs through a confluence with a shallowing and flattening of self, into selfie, as such.

These students are infected with a kind of archive fever very early in their lives.[30] The incessant practice of digitally storing one's acts, of creating a scene for each day,

or even of capturing several visual moments of each day, inculcated by social media selfie practice, turns one's eyes *always toward the past*, with an uncanny sense of the past being both endlessly mobilized as digital data and irretrievable as the proven past, defunct, the old post. My students' belief in the permanency of their digital archives was deeply moving to me, insofar as the digital record of people's social media posts, including old selfies, may prove expungable in the hands of social media companies that are entirely driven by profits.

Back to Plato's Cave

Susan Sontag critiques the photograph as replacement for the real in the influential essays that make up *On Photography*.[31] In the inaugural essay, "In Plato's Cave," Sontag suggests that in gazing at photographs we have lost the ability to see the real world (although the real world is ever so slippery to define). Yet as Susie Linfield, attacking Sontag's narrowly mimetic analysis of photography, argues in *The Cruel Radiance*, some examples of still photography reach beyond mimicry.[32] Artist Christian Boltanski creates obsessive archives of photographic evidence of political violence, but he claims these are not "archives."[33] Rather, they are tableaus. Archive, argues Jacques Derrida, mimics natural memory, material that carries profound psychic meaning, but archive has meaning only in context of cultural knowledge.

Is the collection of diminutive selves, the "selfie" world posted on social media, an affective archive? To address the way the selfie lives and has being in the dream house of social media users, one has to put away paradigms of artistic relevance of the images. The selfie sharply diverges from the self-portrait in intent. A selfie is contextually untranslatable. It is only a selfie in the context of social media. Once torn from social media, it can become something else.

In social media, even as archives seem to be floating and universally accessible, the backed-up digital data are held in physical places, machines that have physical breadth and depth in space. Companies that hold the data do so for economic reasons, so if those economic reasons are gone so are the data. It is not free for the companies to store data and as soon as it becomes unprofitable for them, they will cease to store old posts. For this generation born into social media practice, the archive of feelings that they create is not in their possession. It belongs to social media companies.

A selfie is a transfer point between the embodied and the digitized, between the abstract person and the capitalist corporation. Selfie makes the fantasy of digital time. Digital time is fantasized as eternal, as that super archive which will never be erased. As a transfer point between the embodied and the digital, selfie easily accepts falsification, with filter and photo-editing apps.

The selfie carries definitive incompletion. The selfie taker can never stop for a clear reason, unless she reaches the hard stop of death, or leaves the system of social media altogether. Other than that, selfie repetition is required to keep her face circulating.[34] Selfie practice is not a work of art because a work of art is defined by how it ends.[35]

Women, feminine persons, have since the social inception of photography carried the burden of archiving photography's social images. In the 19th century, women of the middle and upper classes took responsibility for creating family albums of photographs.[36] In the 20th century, women were targeted by advertisers to create and archive family photographs. The burden of creating and maintaining social ties through photography has long been the province of the feminine. Social media replicates this

history and exaggerates it, with young women in their teens and twenties burdened with countless hours doing the labor of social media. This labor includes steep emotional labor, as social media use is correlated with anxiety and depression in young women.[37]

Gathering Wool

Each of these codes of memory—digital, natural, collective, cultural—yearns for something like endless memory or recognition, even as what Derrida describes as "archive fever," the urge to rigorously order virtually material traces as we pass through time, is a signal form of modernity. As Michel Foucault argues, the urge to categorize materiality hierarchically is fused with the longing for power over others.[38] This desire to preserve the terms of power-differential categories itself emerges from the forces of colonization that Fabian theorizes as temporalization. The creation of ideas of time that discipline and exclude cultural patterns of indigenous peoples is at the core of violent colonization. E. P. Thompson's classic essay on capitalism and time similarly argues that control of temporality as a cultural field necessarily co-occurred with capitalism in the creation of the British working class.[39]

Object Worlds

The flattened affective scope of social media archiving derives from its quality as digital data. Unlike digital data, part of the meaning of material objects is the risk they face as objects. Meaning accrues around them through that risk, through the accidental nature of the material world. When I was age 13, on a walk I found a place where sheep had passed, leaving tufts of wool on vegetation. I gathered some of the wool that looked magically bright and kept it in my pocket. I still have a small tuft of that wool. Somehow through the unspeakably many times I've moved since then, without ever deciding to keep it, the small tuft of wool is something I've kept. It hasn't gotten lost. It's accidental that it's held on. Had I taken a selfie and posted it, that image might not persist, after decades, with the tactile tuft of wool's evocation—with the same touch.

Selfie practice, for all that it is argued to be tactile (as we use our hands to click), is really about relinquishing touch, releasing oneself from the hold of the tactile world, allowing a social media company to garner and keep one's memory.[40] You won't put your hand in the pocket of that same coat and feel that same wool. It is not that archives in social media are without affect. It is that this affect is not owned by those who feel it. The compulsive gesture of selfie practice is to give up one's time to the social media platform and in return find that the affect of time itself is numbed, by selfie praxis, though the ache of time is never entirely put away.

Browsing the Past Tense

Social media, for all that it is touted as being of the moment, performs the past tense. Memory, or natural memory, as a function of the affect of time alleviates the feeling of time's arrow (that is, physical systems' irretrievability) as events, places, and people recede from view through the inevitability of change. To whom or what do we really hold on, as intimate supports to our sense of identity? A parent, a spouse, a house,

a job, an artwork, a nation? Of course, the answer is none of these. The promise of photography from its inception was, as William Henry Fox Talbot claimed, to "fix the shadow," that is, to capture and hold still images of the passing facts, including our bodies, that make up the transient material world.[41] But this capture work is always incomplete, as Roland Barthes comments as he seeks the revivification of the dead in *Camera Lucida*.[42]

This is the case because although natural memory holds events in recollected sequences there is a degree of fungibility to that sequencing. Did I play on the swing set first, and then eat cake, on my seventh birthday? I don't know. If my mother had had access to Facebook (nonexistent in the 1970s), there might be digital data holding the exact time line. Would this digital data still be around 43 years later?

Along these same lines of the unfluidity of digital memory, as social media posts are stored and preserved, their pastness is more firmly past than the rhythms of natural memory. This harder emphasis on pastness makes social media practice even more vulnerable to the argument that former, past "nows" are rigidly outside current meaning. That the Wayback Machine archives pastness only articulates how clearly senescent past images are in selfie practice.[43] In natural memory, what has happened can return experientially without being purposely sought. In selfie practice, and in social media generally, the past can be accessed only by purposely seeking it. Whereas one encounters affective natural memory randomly, without intention, in social media this encounter with the past is ossified and must be purposely sought.

The contexts of natural memory, technological memory, cultural memory, and what Walter Benjamin calls "the memory of God" provide frames.[44] But each frame's difference makes all the difference. To be remembered in the context of technological memory is to have one's face and name stored as digitized data for an unspecified length of time. The dream that this memory is eternity stems from Freeman Dyson's conjecture of a memory machine.[45] But it is conjecture that digitized data storage will be the most lasting form of memory human beings have yet created. The desire for digitized eternity, like stone carvings, responds to the limits of natural memory. In natural memory, one remembers during one's lifetime but not beyond it, and one is remembered by those who knew one's self or possibly one's work, but the temporal scope of even such collective memory is not likely to outlast the century of one's biological life. Shakespeare's claim of "immortal rhyme" outlasting stone is unduly optimistic.

But natural and collective memory lead to cultural memory, and, as a mode of cultural memory, objects persist. Archeology excavates lost objects far further in the past than digitized data may persist into the future. The memory of lost and found objects extends further than any other source of memory yet known but is obviously fallible—the more distant in time the object found from the time of its creation, the more conjectural the memory information it yields.[46] This leaves the idea of sacred memory, memory imagined to be held by a deity or by ancestors, often a kind of reciprocal memory wherein worshippers or descendants remember the deity or the ancestors who in turn are believed to store or hold eternal memory of their children. Of course, many people do not believe in sacred memory (what Benjamin, as noted, calls the "memory of God") but many also do. Niro eloquently describes this kind of cultural memory in her mixed media work *For Fearless and Other Indians*.[47]

The curl of time's affect, the way that it pulls emotion caused by change, is not invented by social media platforms. But social media platforms monetize the

manipulation of time's affect. In selfie practice, each day becomes a performance event slanted toward the specificity of the moment as if each mundane moment really mattered and should be ensconced in image. Outside of selfie practice, generally, a large percentage of days are just days. But selfie practice hyperdramatizes the ordinary in a way that distorts temporality, with images as faux inflection points. In selfie practice, a humdrum day is a day to remark oneself in image. This obsessive attention—in selfie practice—has the paradoxical effect of disallowing the way that natural memory selects moments, randomly, that sink deep enough to stay. The way one happens to remember the entrance to the Atlanta airport 20 years ago, for no reason, something about that particular slant of light on one's aunt's face, turning. Selfie practice paradoxically stamps out the capacity of natural memory to randomly choose moments of meaning. It does this by stamping every moment as if it matters.[48]

Archiving Perception

The self, in selfie practice, is an image series that empties identity as the locus of original perception. Because selfie practice is sequential, it not only performs identity but also structures identity, through the skewed prism of instating identity outside one's own perception (that is, the selfie-self is not a perceiver but the perceived). Immanuel Kant argued that the unity of apperception is the core of identity.[49] Through the continuous perception of time, as related to our embodied consciousness, we are aware that we are a self.[50] Kant has rightly been critiqued for racist and sexist ideology and writing, and it is worth asking if his racism and sexism falsify his theory of identity as the unity of apperception.[51] It may be that the assumption of continuous consciousness itself is based on observing social structures in which white, land-owning men were never questioned or threatened, a kind of trauma-free self that is false to the reality of women, nonwhite people, colonized subjects, and those who labor for wages. At the same time, we may see that Kant, who paradoxically also theorized cosmopolitanism, tolerance, and the ethics of seeing other human beings as ends in themselves rather than as means to ends, points to an aspect of identity that grounds self in the embodied episteme.[52] We see ourselves as "ourselves" because we inhabit a temporal episteme from the perspective of embodied vulnerability. This perspective yields a unity of apperception. Selfie practice tears at this field of embodied mnemonic force, creates a temporal pattern that cannot be unified but is by definition split into microfragments of self, each image posted.

It is each of our singular perceptions of time, argues Kant, that gives us a sense that we are embodied conscious entities. And yet, as Maurice Merleau-Ponty makes clear, this sense of identity may come less from one's perception across time as from one's immediate epistemic link to embodied perception.[53] I may know I am a self because I remember being age seven and also because I experience the room I'm in now, the person beside me now, as embodied epistemes, contiguous with and continuous with my own embodied state. Kant's argument regarding memory of one's embodied episteme across time as the definition of identity is persuasive precisely because natural memory, far more than revealing time often seems to collapse it, as clear and distinct recollection can make it seem the past is present, as if one were intimately tied to one's seven-year-old self, some 40 years later. Time defines the self because of the unity of apperception through the affective ache of time.

If the selfie's temporality is askew, this slant is imbricated by its revision of time's episteme. Selfie practice is marked as the past almost as soon as it's posted and so the urge to continue to post is contiguous with the urge to *not* become part of the past. This is more than just commercial aesthetics and capitalist gestalt translated to the practice of selfie—though there definitely is that—it also speaks to a deep-seated longing that what we do in our lives will not become obsolete, meaningless. But because the selfie is always already lodged in the space of the discardable, selfie practice runs on an incessant need to post again to assuage the feeling that what one has yesterday posted is already trash, old news, not really archive but its refuse.[54]

Digital Doll House

Social media is the last house left that we feel we can build in the 21st century. In it we place ourselves, kind of like flat dolls in a dollhouse. Day by day we build these image-houses and dwell in them. The urge of selfie practice is not, by and large, to make a spectacle of ourselves, rather it is to build a space that is our habitation, wherein what we do matters. Selfie is the structure of memory without depth of content, a notion of identity given form as image across time without the eddies and depths of natural memory. Selfie is the self when the affect of time is blunted by repetitious leveraging of the image of the self against nullity, thus it merges into nullity.

The time of the selfie is a temporality under erasure, under threat, because it is never complete. This eerie and uncanny belief that we could and should archive every event, every moment, bends the experience of the structure of the affect of time—constitutive of which is the constancy of elusion and loss—disavowing affect's tight bond to memory. Numbing time's affect as the feeling of the constant vanishing of what is there in any known physical, material world, selfie practice quarantines memory.

Selfie practice pushes to its edge the seemingly inherent connection between archive and affect. Cvetkovich writes eloquently about the affective register of collections of photographs for marginalized groups.[55] And Barthes's *Camera Lucida* is a paean to photography's affective archival force, arguing that we are drawn to photographs because they engender emotion and cause a pain like the pang of love.[56] By contrast, selfie practice subdues the poignancy of its photographic archive as the temporal flattening endemic to selfie practice displaces a deep and abiding sense of community.

Rather than building discrete image-worlds through profound mutual interpellation, selfie practice builds one vastly interconnected image-world that technically pertains to no social group in particular but is data definitely owned by social media companies. Regardless of who sees and posts selfies, these images belong to Facebook and Instagram. Whereas social groups obviously do accrue as nodal points within these larger social media systems, unlike non–social media archiving practices and groups, those within social media are always already owned by, with frames determined by, social media companies. Selfie practice is data used by the companies for their profit. The affective register of selfie practice, then, gets corralled to the affect of time, as opposed to other, more varied and site-specific (or era-specific) emotions. There is a leveling aspect to selfie practice: we become all the same within it.[57] Because it is structured by capitalist dictates, that is, always already within the sphere of profit, the urge to repeat rather than make new slows down and inhibits radical political, cultural, aesthetic, and epistemic shifts within selfie temporality.

This is, as Theodor Adorno wrote of the culture industry, a sphere in which originality is unprofitable.[58] Selfies' ease of repetition puts to shame what Adorno saw as the filmic homogeneity of his era. This is what selfie practice sells, the sense of not moving through time but instead being held in a reiterative stasis of image: the affective shallows can only be kept afloat by constant repetition. Affective depth is impossible in selfie's realm, which instead is dedicated to selling the soothing sense that the affect of time, with its inherent melancholy, is conquered by technology.

The Persistence of Time[59]

Selfie practice is inextricable from social media, as placement within social media defines the act. The fissure and division between social media's digital memory and the memory of the embodied episteme, natural memory, move into selfie practice and reshape the act and function of remembering. Memory and time are of course entwined, and outside of digital practice, they are experiences of paradoxical boundlessness and dearth, or limit. Experience of space-time is both unending, as we cannot absent ourselves from space-time, and limiting, as we cannot experience more than one space-time locus in each given instant. So we are aware of time's mortal arc with regard to our own individual embodiment.[60] Even so, time feels limitless because we cannot know experience outside time; but in another rather obvious sense, time is boundary (an endless boundary, to compound the paradox), mortality. One may say that everyone over age four is aware that at some point they will cease to live. Mortal time is an experience of dearth, as we are all vulnerable to time's limitations.

Memory, and here I mean natural memory, partly acts as antidote to time's limits. As a practicing poet, courting the mnemonic, maybe I'm more steeped in the practice and habit of retrieving the past, but in general natural memory assuages time's losses. Even so, natural memory and embodied mortal time paradoxically, despite their epistemic richness, are experiences of limit, dearth, lack. In teaching students born just around the turn of the 21st century, I note that they mistrust natural memory and embodied mortal time.[61] It's easy to see why my digital native students feel this way. Every human being dies, and the overwhelming majority thereof are forgotten entirely and soon. Or, to put it more gently, most human beings are remembered only by those who knew them closely and hence are forgotten as those close contacts themselves successively pass away. I know the names of my eight great-grandparents, and something of their life stories. But not the names or fates of their parents. And so on. As Marcus Aurelius argues, memory itself can be experienced as tantalization: I can conjure and hear my grandmother's voice but cannot cause her to be alive again.

As Johnny Thunders succinctly put it, "You can't put your arms around a memory."[62] Digital data are tantalizing. I can google "Johnny Thunders" and see images of the rock legend, but those are only ways of sharing someone else's secondhand memories, not a real affective archive. For the most part, it's less satisfying to view digital data's expression of photographs than to dwell in actual memory, which has an immersive quality. As James Elkins rightly states, photography has a quality of detritus, the dead skin of the world that sloughs off into image.[63] But in selfie practice there is no skin, or rather it is all skin, disallowed to slough. Selfie is the realm of the image-epidermal.

Big Tech and the Archive

The rejection of natural memory in favor of digital memory is an act of faith for digital natives.[64] We are all always looking for loopholes to mortality and the limits of natural memory. People believe—variously—in God's redeeming grace, reincarnation, multiple versions of afterlife, or the immortality of the artist through art (*ars longa, vita brevis*). This last aphorism—art is long, life is short—is original to the Greek Aphorismi of Hippocrates, and the translation bears consideration: *Ὁ βίος βραχύς, ἡ δὲ τέχνη μακρή*. That is, life is fragile, breakable, but *techne* is big, too big to break. *Techne* here does not refer to digital technology, of course; it refers to art and also to knowledge that has force. The knowledge that has force, can that be social media? Certainly social media is technology. But unlike material forms of art, social media is code, not object. The accidental survival of objects, on which archeology largely depends, will not be a fate that befalls social media posts. Either digitized data will be purposely preserved or accidentally (or purposely) expunged. It will not be accidentally saved. Because of social media's platform structure, we see mostly what the company wants us to see rather than what we accidentally find. So it is difficult to argue that, simply as a dataset, posts grant immortality of memory. Instead, they join the vast repertoire of digitized images that will never be looked at again after their initial posting.

What if I take a selfie every half hour of every day from now 'til my death? I post them on an Instagram account, and every selfie is seen by friends of my generation. Then, say, two or three decades after my death if no one looks at my selfies, am I still remembered, even if the data are preserved? The data are there but no one's home, so to speak.

In selfie practice, my identity is triangulated with past selfie posts. In natural memory, by contrast, I remember what I have seen, heard, thought, felt, tasted, or touched. In selfie practice, I remember because I am seen as a digital mark. In digital memory practice, selfie practice, it is not I who remembers my own life, but rather I persist by being remembered in the spectral and derealized *waiting area* of social media platforms, digitized data stored in warehoused computers.

Social media selfie practice marks me as progressing through events via selfie posts; that is, I move through stages of appearance rather than stages of experience. One of the eeriest parts of selfie practice is the ease with which the aging process can be hidden through filters. Inasmuch as social media memory displaces natural memory in effect if not on purpose, in the minds of digital natives the memory of self is not that which one holds in one's consciousness, but instead it is that which a social media platform stores. This is the new unity of apperception in AI, that time's mark should be effaced.

A digitized archive is also not that other *people* remember you; it is that your mark, through selfie practice, is stored by digital memory. Digital natives have a kind of split-screen identity—they still use natural memory, to some extent, because it's unavoidable, but also their identity is that which is stored by social media. This raises the question of what it means to remember and to be remembered. Must memory ultimately involve a human being? Or can we be remembered without any other human being knowing of us, with only digital data inscribing our trace, and with no human being ever seeing it?

I've never kept a journal or saved photographs of any aspect of my life, so there is no archive of when I drove across America at age 20. I just remember it. A digital

native might well have recorded driving alone across America at that age. Would she, after 25 years, be able to look back and access those digital marks? Would her social media platform have held onto the code? For me, driving from southeast Georgia to Seattle, Washington, I was trying to survive after my car broke down, and that series of events is clearly marked in my mind. Social media offers a promissory note to its users that time will *not* break down or that if it does break down there will be witnesses, immediately! Time feels less risky in social media's paradigm, where you are followed in your every move by those who track your feed. And yet in scripting time this way, one is substantially less agentic, and perhaps in selfie practice no mnemonic mark goes deep enough to stay of its own accord.

Highs and Lows of Selfie Life

Facebook friends andInstagram followers may live next door to each other and share firewood when the power's out. But if so, that connection is extraneous to Facebook and Instagram. The function of natural memory in embodied experience can move toward a kind of reciprocal altruism: we know each other, so we'll help each other out. The example of social media's role in the Arab Spring in 2010 is cast in this vein. However, mutual memory can cause violence in the opposite scenario—as in the violent community that has gathered around QAnon. Natural memory, as the key to the temporality of "facing," acts radically differently from capitalist memory in social media.[65] Capitalist memory mimics reciprocity but can only enact transaction, hence the spats and feuds that plague social media.[66]

For Adorno, mass culture earns money for its CEOs by supplanting our ability to create our own culture. The selfie supplants the way that the imagination builds image-objects of others. Rather than building our knowledge of friends and associates through the amalgamation of remembering words, actions, images, and touch, the selfie devolves to image. The selfie does not in any direct sense mean we cannot also build our own images of each other, but it may work, as Adorno argues mass culture works, by subtly erasing the layered image-worlds we create in our minds. If my memory of my lifelong best friend is a palimpsest of image, word, affect, and history, this is a more layered and empathic representation than any series of selfie photographs I might see of her.

Submerging the Memory Palace

What Adorno claims happens to consumers of mass culture is that imagination and its ability to create what he considers valid culture (songs, stories, images) are usurped by repetitious culture products. Repetition, more than any other quality, happens in the social realm in selfie practice. Rather than knowing friends and loved ones in the way of memory, one knows them through static, episodic images, via social media. One extends Adorno's early 20th-century argument to say that we consume selfies and social media images in the way that earlier generations consumed mass media products, and an atrophy of social resonance or deep social imagining co-occurs.

But this atrophy has a specifically temporal fold: it relocates archival depth in the realm of the shallow. Fabian's theory (discussed earlier) of the imposition of colonialist, Western frames of time opens a way of understanding the selfie as phenomenon of ego-document identity.[67] The crux of Fabian's argument is that Western colonization

falsely conceptualizes time as a linear force of progress, in which the concept of the primitive signifies that which is imagined to precede culture. Fabian contends that the roots of the concept of linear, progressive, and, hence, violent time are to be found in classical Greek notions of memory and image.

For Fabian, the memory palace in classical Greece is a system of memory wherein orators remembered points of long speeches by placing different concepts and arguments in various sections of a many-roomed palace, specifically locating those concepts as image-objects.[68] This eidetic memory practice turned thought into image, placing time as a field that should be controlled rather than moved through. The stasis of the memory palace composed of eidetic forms (image-objects), as opposed to competing notions of time as circular, recurrent, dispersive, or branching, serves social media, even as selfies present a debased version of the memory palace.

Fabian's unpacking of the reconceptualization of time as a form of empire reveals the (false) cultural notion of Western colonialist concepts of time as the only correct perceptions of temporality. I draw from his debunking of Western notions of time in my reading of selfie culture for the memory palace practice of classical Greece (where Fabian locates the origin of a dominating colonialist concept of time) may be a precursor to the urge to manifest identity through social media posts. Unlike the archive, the memory palace is performative and transient. Your memory palace dies with you.

In social media, the ego-document of the selfie is designed to never occupy any physical-material juncture other than the screen. It is the memory palace of the 21st century. Selfie practice is lodged in the eerie private-public domain of that which is *constitutive of* the self. It enacts a hollowing out of the project of the memory palace, where the image of the self comes to stand for the value of the self, a collapse in which the intermediary objects—of a life and the culture that produces it—are set aside in favor of the reiterated self-image.

Notes

1 Even in drawing from Indo-European language, I note the incompleteness of this view; there are of course other language roots and hence other practices for storing cultural knowledge and memory. Indeed language itself is an archive of history and cultural memory. See Émile Benveniste, *Dictionary of Indo-European Concepts and Society*, trans. Elizabeth Palmer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).
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16 Lindsay, *Murder State*, 45–57.
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18 Julia Eckel, Jens Ruchatz, and Sabine Wirth, eds., *Exploring the Selfie: Historical, Theoretical, and Analytical Approaches to Digital Self-Photography* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).
19 Class comment from student, October 2019. The student expressed a wish to remain anonymous.
20 Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969).
21 See *Condorhuasi-Alamito Funerary Mask*, 500 BC–AD 500, stone, 4⅞ × 4¼ × 1¼″ (12.4 × 10.8 × 3.2 cm), Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/708744.
22 James Elkins, ed. *Photography Theory*, vol. 2 of *The Art Seminar* (New York: Routledge, 2008).
23 As my 8-year-old niece put it, "No, I don't want you to tell me the answer, I want the internet to tell me," when she asked to use her mother's iPhone to look up the spelling of a word. Isabella Corral, November 23, 2016.
24 Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).
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26 Cvetkovich, *Archive of Feelings*.
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49 Stephen Engstrom, "Unity of Apperception," *Studi Kantiani* 26 (2013): 37–54.
50 John Locke argues similarly to Kant that continuous perception of memory encodes identity. See Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding and a Treatise on the Conduct of the Understanding* (Philadelphia: Kay & Troutman, 1847).
51 Stella Sandford, "Kant, Race, and Natural History," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 44, no. 9 (2018): 950–77.
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56 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 19–21.
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58 Theodor Adorno, *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. J. M. Bernstein (London: Routledge, 2001).
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more *real* than natural memory emerging from embodied mortal time. Their devotion to social media stems not from narcissistic self-involvement but from a belief that meaning itself—temporal and symbolic—is held in digital data only.

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63 Elkins, *Photography Theory*, 64.
64 Jaron Lanier, *You Are Not a Gadget* (New York: Vintage, 2011).
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6 Selfie-as-Mask

In *Face and Mask*, historian Hans Belting makes the case that the human face functions variably as a mask and as a face, extending a nuanced understanding of differential acts of facial representation, including self-portraiture.[1] For Belting, the mask is the ritual performance of the social face and is also connected to the subject's mortality, whether it be the literal death mask or portraits that engage the sitter's mortality. In this chapter, I seek connections between selfie practice and masking, making the case that selfies are closer to masks than to the modern self-portrait (by *modern*, I mean here early modern, Renaissance, and beyond). The selfie, I suggest, is itself a throwback, reaching back before Renaissance notions of introspection, returning to the mask as ritual practice. In selfie practice, the mask is a small digital picture.

In selfie practice, not only is the sequence of images of the self marked by social media's intrinsic time stamping, but also the idea of a lineation of self emerging from one's Instagram posts makes the face stand baldly, blatantly, *for* time. Roland Barthes argues that the "eidos" of the photograph is death, because photographs serve as markers of something that once happened and is over; intimating that we ourselves at some point will be something that happened and is over, the portrait approaches the death mask.[2] But selfie practice shifts the photographic image so that it stands not so much as a marker of mortality but as mask (rather than signifier) of time itself. Selfie is not a confrontation with the mortal self but a repetition of the living self, drumming out the time of embodiment, a mask repeatedly applied. The derivative of identity that is the selfie is hewn by social media companies to provide a feeling of containing the ache of the affect of time. Structuring identity as a selfie-self, the selfie mask goes before the physical body, stands to the side of the physical body, in front of it, and, in a kind of ecstasy, *apart* from the self. Selfie time is preemptory, *look here, look now!*

The temporality of the selfie contrasts its instatement of identity with that of the photographic self-portrait. Whereas the photographic self-portrait has the capacity to stage an encounter of the self with the self, the selfie is a mask circulated through the ritual of social media to enact a persona in a digitized, shallowly ritualized context. The selfie's temporality is compulsive, propulsive, the temporality of anxious habit. Whereas the photographic self-portrait may stage what theorist Amelia Jones calls a site of "eternal return," the selfie is not about mnemonic folds.[3] Selfie exteriorizes the time of identity, shaping a rigid mask. It resists the pain implied in confronting mortal time in favor of the numbing affect of time's multiple conscriptions to variously arrayed clocks, or temporal posts, that are social media's form. The dailiness,

hourliness, minute-by-minute time frame of selfie practice circumvents return. Or, return is dramatized by throwback images that articulate how impossible return is in selfie practice. As a mask, the selfie is circulated in the quasi-magical ritual of asking *always* for the now, numericalized, gaze of others.

For Hans Belting, the selfie is a figure of the self's diminishment.[4] Belting's works *Face and Mask* and *An Anthropology of Images* trace a broad sweep of the history of creating the human image, including its replication as mask.[5] His work is foundationally shaped by Western European forms of interpreting the image, though Belting does reach toward other traditions of image making—Asian, African, and Indigenous American—in his discussions. His contention that mask making is a form of *prosopopoeia*, that is, related to ancient traditions of oratory, at first glance would seem to place Belting in precisely the frame that Johannes Fabian argues against: the European notion of time as that which we progress through, toward a linear goal stemming from origins in Greek culture.

And yet, Belting's interpretation of the mask of making face connects early creation of the image of the human face—beyond classical Greece—with the conceptual facing of death. Recreating the human face as image is a turn toward the loss of face, the "losing face" of being erased by either physical death or social ostracism.[6] Whereas Belting interprets the selfie as a way of losing face, in the sense of diminishing the meaning of social presentation of the self, one also notes that the selfie is an extension of the originary gesture of shaping a mask of the human face as a go-between: between death and life, facing that which is imagined to intercede between the realms. The selfie serves as a circular rite of passage that stays in place, static, marking the past as defunct, the old selfie as throwback. It intercedes between the realms, but does not enunciate a direct confrontation with death. Rather, it oscillates between the body and coded data.

Lost-and-Found Self

The selfie-self is a lost-and-found self, a paradox. The selfie seeks to secure a space of identity in the field of erasure that technological cosmopolitanism enforces; that is, the mask of the selfie is both made up of and exists in the stratum of technologies, of AI and of digital photography. The mask of the selfie unfolds in the field of technologies, the digital photographic and that of AI. The selfie mask digitizes the representation of the human face like a mask, but the ritual surrounding that representation is flattened, restricted to repeating the (next) selfie. The flat self of the selfie functions as a mask, in the sense that it is a shallowly ritualized face image that covers the identity of the actor (the person taking the selfie), even as the ritual act of the selfie (unlike earlier traditions of masking) is simply to create and launch the selfie.[7]

Like a traditional mask, the selfie ritually introduces the actor into a field of scripted social performance: through the selfie an individual becomes a social media persona, unlinked to the mundane (and often invisible) daily acts of boredom, suffering, or of just being there to hear and see others.[8] The selfie-self cannot be a listener. Instead, the purpose of the selfie mask is to silence others into watching, and thereby to allow the self a banal transcendence. Unlike earlier traditions of masking, however, the selfie enacts its extramaterial presence (on a screen, in digital code) by reiterating, repeating, daily events of eating, gathering with friends, the quotidian of travel. Its transcendence, then, does not reach toward another realm

but rather seeks to *extend the banal realm of the everyday into an endless sequence of digital images*.

This tension between the quotidian and the numerical infinite creates a banal sublimity, with the selfie mask covering the self the way that Barthes suggests every photograph is a death mask until this insight itself becomes superfluous. Selfie-world doesn't care if this is your death mask; for in selfie culture the very terms of death are beside the point. The point is the continual presence of image not in its aesthetic capacity but in its reiterative practice. Yes, the dead can no longer post new selfies, but the repetitive practice of selfies masks the telos of death.

It is this eerie supersaturation of the ordinary that places selfie practice at once in the realm of ritual and in the space of the insipid profane—eating supper, showing off your boobs in a tank top—thus making events that might qualify as different from the ordinary (visiting a Shinto shrine, mastering Ravel's *Gaspard de la Nuit*) in turn very ordinary. Selfie culture negates the original, paradoxically, by attempting to wrest a visual icon of identity from every place and moment in a life.

Losing Face

The representation of the face as mask so as to create and maintain social position reaches back, contends Belting, to ancient uses of funerary masks as a means of allowing the living to impersonate an honored dead person, hence extending his social life (BCE funerary masks, regardless of provenance, appear to be of male faces).[9] Funerary masks appear to have been placed onto the faces of the deceased so that they could "face" the afterlife intact, or in some cases to have been worn by the living to represent the dead, as they move into the afterlife.[10] That might seem far from selfie practice, which is enacted by snapping digital photographic images, applying photo-editing apps, and posting through social media, but the masking aspects of selfie practice are paramount. Selfie practice is not a descendent of Renaissance introspection. Selfie practice is a mask to appease the affective weight of time.

If beliefs that fueled ancient funerary mask rituals appear to have been associated with faith that the face of the deceased would be *seen* in the afterlife, that one needed an acceptable face to be gazed upon by powers beyond embodied human beings, selfie practice serves a similar imaginative function for social media users. A belief in the permanency of the social media database, a mythic faith in the idea of the unending gaze of the database surveying every face posted via selfie, reassembles prehistorical structures of belief in an immortal gaze watching the faces of humans in the afterlife. Funerary masks (*not* death masks) are deep precursors to, progenitors of, selfie practice.

Selfies are used in a way that is eerily similar to funerary masks, which are differentiated from death masks. They are circulated to stand in for the self, not to stand (as self-portraits do) as interrogation of the self.[11] Unlike self-portraits, selfies do not stage a confrontation with mortality but instead are a key gesture in the ritual of social media, geared toward numbing the affect of time. And yet, selfies, unlike funerary masks, are not objects and as digitized data are largely immaterial. Most selfies are all but extinct by the day after they're posted. What is of continuous interest to social media platforms is the new post, not the old, because that's how the money keeps coming in (for social media companies).

In drawing connections between the circulation of the selfie on social media and the use of funerary masks in disparate cultures—Phoenician, pre-contact American, Mycenean—I do not forward an argument of influence but rather of urge. Millennia before the common era, the funerary mask was used to extend the trope of identity beyond the body of the deceased. The work of the mask was *not* to explore the meaning of the self, not to engage personal psychology, but to save face with the gaze of ancestors and deities. If funerary masks from 6000 BCE to 1000 BCE, in disparate locations not expressive of mutual influence, served apparently similar purposes of instating identity as mask at the precise stress point of identity's loss—death—we can see that selfie practice, using digital code rather than stone or metal, picks up the habit of instating identity at the precise stress point of the threat of identity's erasure.[12] But for selfie practice this erasure is not directly that of physical death but of the absorption of the self into erosive systems of techno-bureaucracy. Through the metonymy of the mask, selfies are circulated not as self-exploration but as symbols angled toward specific social groups; the symbols, importantly, are also angled toward the numerical gaze of the algorithm, so that it will reward them with its numbers. The social media platform of this entity imaginatively takes the place of the gaze of the gods in the 21st century, "an infinite repository of masks."[13]

As the funerary mask is created so that the dead can save face, maintain a face in the imagined context of the afterlife, the selfie is circulated so that AI will track how others like it, see it, comment on it, share it. As the funerary mask is placed on a corpse so that the body's disintegration is assuaged by the mask's persistence, the idea of imagined gods who *see* the dead is given material manifestation. Posting images on the internet has a similar impetus. Posted data are saved by supercomputer banks that operate invisibly, that is, not in places where the overwhelming majority of social media users see them. For social media users the gaze of the internet is as invisible as the gaze of the gods in cultures that created funerary masks with which to face the gods in the afterlife.

Copy Cat

As Belting argues, the mask is a "copy of the face," a substitute for it.[14] The selfie is the image-as-mask precisely because of its repetitiousness. The intention of the selfie inheres in repeated masking; hence the aesthetic presence of any individual image does not stage—aesthetically—an encounter with time. Instead, the encounter with temporality is shouldered off onto the time frame of social media, the holder of the post. Whereas Belting argues that all photographic images are masks, and Barthes likewise suggests that photographic portraits are a kind of death-mask, sealing the image in one moment, I would at once agree with them and also counter that self-portraits (and many other photographs) can stage aesthetic recognition *of* this photographic mask effect and consequently resist it. As Dawn Wilson argues, agency makes itself felt through aesthetics.[15] It is not the specific trick of the photographic self-portrait that proves or disproves agency as rather that aesthetic terms and formal signifiers, including cultural tropes, can comment on the self-portrait as copy, moving it into the realm of re-presentation as opposed to mimesis, making it a face rather than a mask.

Here I echo Barthes's claim that photography is closer to theater than to painting.[16] But my concern is not so much *how* a photograph is made—by the imprint of light whether digital or analog—but how it is used in time. Funerary masks (from Phoenicia,

the Americas, Mycenae) are *not* exact replicas of faces. The use of funerary masks is about the relationship with the imagined other—the gods (or, in social media, AI), who are believed to see beyond the realm of immediate physicality. Needless to say, funerary masks were not created by the dead but by the living for the dead, and yet their function is similar to that of the selfie in that it looks to an imagined omniscience (a deity or AI, respectively).

A selfie seems to transcend place and time: I could post a selfie of myself on awaking in Virginia, and this image could be viewed by an Instagram follower in Chennai, or I could on waking in Virginia view a selfie just posted by a friend in Chennai having supper. The imaginative space of this translation feels disembodied even as nothing is really disembodied about it, as digital data are stored in machines, which are material objects. This imaginative space of transumption, which encourages participants in social media to feel that they have moved outside embodiment, is precisely what I mean by the god's-eye view that is imaginatively if erroneously imputed to social media AI.

To post a selfie is to imagine oneself taken up by a larger gaze, comparable in social imaginary with the belief of funerary masks' creators in the gaze of the afterlife. Of course, such masks were not made by the dead, but they are even so comparable to selfies in their invocation of an imagined audience—the gods' gaze, or for us the technological gaze that Nick Bostrom calls "superintelligence"—all-seeing, all-knowing AI.[17] The internet, while capable of extreme invasiveness via the use of culled data, nonetheless is not all-knowing in any eternal sense. But the belief of the selfie poster that posting a selfie is a move toward infinity spurs this compulsive masking. The infinity of the gaze of social media withers around most individual images, and so the act of posting is that of a kind of religion, a faith.

The afterlife of the internet is at once real—social media data are egregiously persistent—and imaginary, in that the very enormity of the amount of data posted (selfies alone are posted by the billions every week) means that the likelihood of one's own image being seen in the future by anyone other than one's own descendants is remote. The human gazes that selfies find are typically about as brief as those of passing each other in the street. But the very absorptive quality of social media's gaze, its seemingly magical ability to retain images, has the performative effect of a gaze that never fails or ceases, feeling godlike to users, even as the overabundance of visual information means that the selfie-as-face will be seen very little, it may be seen *less* than the person one passes in the street.

The gaze of the internet is as imaginary as that of the gods in that there is no *there* to the abstractly continuous, AI viewership of posted data. And yet it is precisely this abstracted gaze that lures the selfie into being. Far from being preserved against time, data stored in supercomputers are arguably more vulnerable than stone masks buried in the earth. It is the allure of that abstract AI gaze, that sense of its endlessness, the belief that there is an all-encompassing gaze gathering our images, holding our faces, that aligns the conceptualization of the posted selfie with the funerary mask hewn for facing the afterlife.

Numb Personae

The selfie is a mask circulated to separate identity from embodied person. Selfie acts as a computer-generated mask, a processual identity appeasing the traumatic nature of

the affect of time, that is, both revealing and covering the affective experience of time. Apps that edit images move the selfie away from analogue photography's status as the mark of a particular physical reality at a particular time. In its mask function, selfie practice creates what Jia Tolentino calls the "cyborg" face, a repetitious aesthetic that emerges from photo-editing apps like Facetune. Also described as "algorithm face," it is a facial shape that responds to numerical dictates of what coders think a human face should look like, dictates that arise in a racist culture.[18] The Instagram or algorithm face aesthetic is built on disavowal, and emerges from an uncanny zone of fabular numerical design, striving to look like a numerical average of entrenched racist and sexist ideas of beauty.[19]

Instagram Face is a term that describes women—usually young women, cisgender and trans—who populate Instagram with selfies that reflect photo-editing apps that dramatically alter the facial structure of the selfie taker and that cohere with popular cosmetic procedures. Instagram Face is a mask of an obvious sort, a frozen mix of human and digital. And it's a mask in more than just its appearance on Instagram. It likely *feels* like a mask by the person wearing it, because the cosmetic procedures of subdural injections used to create Instagram Face numb and freeze the face and skin, rendering less mobile the lips, the eyes, and the neck.[20] *Numbness* is the central feature of the experience for the woman who gets Instagram Face through cosmetic procedures. Others may see her more, but she feels less and less.

The "filler" technique involves a person allowing her face—cheeks, lips, and jaw—to be injected with material that plumps up the skin so that cheekbones look more pronounced, lips fuller, the jawline more defined. But the effect works best in photography. When you see, face to face, women who have had fillers, they look a little gory. I don't mean to judge anyone's choices; I'm just pointing out that fillers do not look like people's natural faces. For me, the fine-grained look of skin, however wrinkled, splotchy, whatever it is, looks better than plastic.

Critics note the bland blend of Instagram Face, arguing that this face appropriates presumed traits of different ethnicities. That line of argument sounds somewhat inherently racist, as various peoples of various ethnicities have full lips, high cheekbones, small noses, or almond eyes, whatever is popular on Instagram. Instead Instagram Face erases heritable quirks and lived history; it erases what makes the human face so compelling, whether conventionally beautiful or not. Hence, Instagram Face erases time twice. It effaces that we inherit our faces from our ancestors. It erases our parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, they who echo in our actual unretouched faces. And it erases time's marks. It is perhaps not joyful to look 50 instead of 20. Or, if one is lucky enough to get there, 80 instead of 50. But it is temporally accurate. Theorists—from William Henry Fox Talbot to Eadweard Muybridge to Barthes—see the photograph as intimately linked to time, the image of time.[21] But Instagram Face "burns" this photographic conceit of revealing time. Instagram Face covers time.

Re-Touching

Think about eyes, lips, and the neck as pulse points of embodied identity. We see through our eyes, we speak through our lips, we display signs of aging on our neck, which also happens to be among the body's most physically vulnerable places. Numbing these areas—with cosmetic procedures of fillers and the neurotoxin Botox—not only creates a stiff, mask-like face but also creates a feeling of numbness for the

person who has the procedures. By the feeling of numbness, I mean physiologically numbed skin from repeated cosmetic procedures.

From my adolescence, I remember that *existential* numbness of being looked at *because* I was becoming a young woman. At puberty, young women don an automatic mask—that of the "pretty girl"—because everyone's looking at them. But young women still have physiological feeling in their skin, eyes, mouth, and neck because they haven't had filler injections.[22]

What's new about Instagram Face is numbness, not just as a social force of sexist oppression but physiological manifestation resulting from cosmetic procedures.[23] Numbness is physical and metaphysical in Instagram Face, where the mask is not on top of the face but beneath the skin—*fillers* bulging beneath the subject's skin and lips, making her face numb. The stillness of the image becomes the stillness of the person of whom the image is made, as the face—masked beneath the skin by fillers and Botox—holds frozen still.

The time of Instagram Face is stopped time in a way that borrows from photography its stillness and applies frozen time to the living face of the photographic subject. The mask cannot move: that is the key difference between mask and face. But if Barthes argues that he becomes "death personified" in the photograph, he is still able to leave the photograph and continue as a person who changes.[24] The eerie difference of Instagram Face is that it posits and to some extent fulfills the desire to *become* the photograph—to freeze the face into photographic form not only in the space of the photograph but also in life. The mask that is Instagram Face pits itself against temporal flow in a way that emerges from earlier photographic practices but also subverts them. Entertainer Jennifer Lopez, in her selfie-as-fawn images, tries to look like a new fawn even as she moves into her sixth decade of life. In the frozen time of social media's repetitions, Instagram Face negates the photographic subject's desire to feel and replaces it with the need to have others feel in response to one's image.

Coin a Face

The face as coin of social media's realm is an object of exchange. As such, it is mask. Realizing that no face (other than perhaps a newborn's) is entirely natural—we wear marks of culture's effects in our expressions, we wear makeup, we get tattoos—even so the face is mobile. The face meets time: one is always unprepared for what comes next, blind before the infinite divisions of the asymptotic curve of mortal time. In nonselfie time, experience is syncretic and synthetic. One remembers events not wholly according to a sense of how others might approve or disapprove of that memory but rather according to events' capacity to spontaneously mark the psyche. I recall, say, from a faculty meeting the many rings worn by the person sitting next to me at the meeting: not a detail pertinent to the meeting, but one randomly adherent to recollection. In moving through space-time you are not waiting to encounter space-time. You are immersed in it. It moves randomly toward and away.

By contrast, consider the experience of the selfie-self: I create myself as mask and wait for others' response to this mask. Rather than immersion, selfie practice structures a social space (and nonplace) in which my selfie has reality only if others approve it and circulate it. In selfie practice, my own experience of space-time is this waiting for the other's gaze. Yes, also in embodied nonselfie life we depend on some sense of being seen by others and acknowledged by others, yet also many stretches

of time we move through are unhailed, unseen. More to the point, our existence is given ontological heft not by the other's gaze but by our own. If I go to a café to see a friend, argues Jean-Paul Sartre, the café is only grounded when my friend arrives and I am no longer floating, not alone, but with him.[25] And yet even so in the café I see what is there, regardless of my friend's presence. I am not waiting for my friend's gaze to create the very substance of what I see. But selfie practice has no meaning, no "ground," without the gazes of many other people and AI. The text of selfie practice is the text of asking to be created, sublimating oneself to AI to circulate one's image. If I post a selfie and no one looks at it, it has not become a selfie. It is just an image. But if I walk into the café and wait and my friend never arrives, I am still in the café.

Symbolic Violence

The "soft" or symbolic violence of selfie practice inheres precisely in its mask properties. Frantz Fanon argues, in *Black Skin, White Masks*, that the colonized are forced to try to mimic the appearance of colonizer that they can never embody precisely because they are cast through colonization as the "other."[26] Facebook and Instagram on the surface are open and flexible patterns. And yet, patterns of racial segregation, implicit indicators of discrimination, heavily factor into social media algorithms that determine which users see what. The imposition of what Fanon so accurately terms *white masks* abounds in selfie discourse, even as the recognition of these masks is largely elided in social media. The soft violence of selfie practice works through a kind of mesh, or enmeshed, pattern created by social media web patterns.

The Webs between Us

Paul Frosh understands the selfie as a kind of connective tissue, a webbing drawing together sociality in the 21st century.[27] In selfie practice, the selfie-self is continuously proffered before technological time and rebuffed by technological time. The horizon of technology cannot actually respond with that sense of time slowing that occurs when one is an embodied situation of social parity and reciprocity; the time of technology, rather, is a descendent of what Fabian sees as colonialization's time; that is, it is a structure of power and dominance.

The selfie enacts the self as image that becomes repetition in the face of scarcity, continually coming up against a denial of comfort of the most fundamental kind: copacetic physical co-presence. Embodied experience does not always mean plenitude. It can bring vulnerability, pain, violence, frustration, and mortality. But the time of the selfie is technological time, which like its precursor colonialist time is a structure of power, of implicit denial. The erroneous belief that the nonindustrialized world (in the 19th and 20th centuries) was *primitive* and less advanced than the Western time of the colonizers. The social imaginary of the selfie depends on the implicit conceit of technological time. In the hierarchy of technological time, value is ordered by numerical indices. And yet, because of the feeling of interconnection the World Wide Web confers, in selfie practice one feels one has extended beyond oneself. This extension is largely illusory—the selfie-self proffered to technological time quickly recedes. Then the selfie taker feels compelled to take another selfie. It is like gambling: the pleasure is in the constant deficit of pleasure.[28]

Sherry Turkle argues, in *Alone Together*, that social media use corrodes our collective and individual sense of social satisfaction.[29] The appeal and allure of social media is its newness, a virtual extension of the Bauhaus ideal of living in the modern, sculpted realms of technological architecture. Social media is the architecture of our lives. This is more than a metaphor. The pull of social media is architectural, a space of endless shift. Paradoxically social media eludes earlier forms of structured technological time—you *check* your media feed always, everywhere—there is no regime of schedule. But even as the always available social media feed seems to relax the regimented pace of earlier modernities, it enforces a deeper strain of never-ending intrusion. Social media is always there: it has no need of an alarm clock, because it *is* an alarm clock. It resets the technological time of mid-century modernity, the time of *punching the clock*, by wholly absorbing it.

Masking Time

Social media's endless availability then is not a rebuke to technological time, but is the mask of technological time. Consider the history of posts. Posts were long defined as markers set in the ground to indicate direction and boundaries in physical spaces. The term *post* carries a ghost of the physical world as each social media post defines a territory—I was here and here is my territory.[30] Likewise, *feed* means to "cause to move gradually and steadily, typically through a confined space."[31] Exactly: social media is a confined space. You cannot step outside Instagram and still be on Instagram. If you quit Instagram you have no relationship to it. That may sound tautological, but think of it this way: you can step outside your house and still have a connection to your house by, say, standing in the yard or walking down the street and seeing your house from another vantage. Social media is a confined space in the strictest sense. You cannot see it from another vantage. It is either-or. Either you participate in Instagram, or you don't see it. Yes, you can google, say, Cindy Sherman's Instagram page and see a few images, but this only increases the feeling of constricted space, as a nonsubscriber will be told by the social media platform that the number of images available to view is limited. Until they sign up and participate, that is.

Time is presented as an endless flow through a narrow space in social media's deep bureaucratization of sociality. Time is held even so on the tightest of leashes—the continual feed through the narrow space of a device's screen, usually a phone. Leashed to our phones, time is marked by the time stamp of posts. The brittle substance of social media time is friable, it flakes at points of stress. If I wake with an alarm clock and get an Uber ride to teach an early morning class, I'm experiencing an older version of technological time—industrial model scheduling forces me to awaken, to move my body to the car that is itself an industrial product, and to teach at a university increasingly modeled on factory productivity, the product of learning.

And yet, I can also elude this technological time by, say, walking home at dusk after teaching, listening to owls in the trees. If I post a selfie on Monday morning, that post *cannot* be eluded within the frame of social media. It can be forgotten or ignored, but not changed. In this way, social media extends a Bauhaus ideal of technological time—that we should be entirely inside the technological, encased therein.[32] Social media, more so than a subway train that can be late, more regimented than a classroom that contains human beings who are sleepy or unprepared, is a machine without space-time vulnerability. It has, therefore, no malleable course, no leeway.[33]

Steeped in technological time, selfie practice is a figurative enunciation of the self as ensconced in technological time. Here I do not mean that one becomes a technological subject via selfie posting. We do *not* really become cyborgs through this practice. Instead what happens is the full (or fuller) acceptance of the mark of technological time on the self. Not "I remember the day I arrived in Rome, it was the end of October," but "Here is my selfie in Rome, dated 31 October." There is no negotiation with the selfie.

Technological time is already an anachronism; technologies as in standardized clocks, trains, buses, airplanes, and analog photographs are by now all old hat. We've swallowed the regularized time of the alarm clock, the highway, the train schedule. Social media time is the descendent of these technologies and as such can still be glossed technological time, but social media time bends in ways that earlier technological time did not. The train from Charlottesville to New York City, for example, follows a schedule determined by statistical use patterns rather than, say, lunar shifts. That schedule is posted online, and I can buy my ticket online and show it to the conductor on my phone screen. But it is not a social media schedule. The train still contends with bodies in space, the needs of bodies in space, the reality of bodies in space-time. Social media accords insularly to the time of AI's gaze. Its intrusive reach emerges from the illusion of users' agency and volition in the process of creating its temporal mask—social media users entering a bureaucratized time that has successfully masked itself as pleasure.

Computer-Generated Selfie

It is a given of air travel that you do not see much of the land you cross but float above it. With selfies you do not see much of the person of whom this is an image; you cannot see her closely and intimately the way that you would be confronted with her face to face or in a self-portrait. Instead you see an image that is numerically successful—with Instagram and Facebook algorithms—if it can be seen and read, instantaneously it propagates itself. Faces are made similar, by apps such as Facetune, as selfie faces are shaped by the same grid. It is the temporality that creates the mask. The bureaucratic ideal of sameness becomes the mask of selfie practice, wherein we repeat expected actions and poses that are instantly legible and actionable, shared or liked. Selfie practice creates a repetition, a mask, of bureaucratic population management.

Digital data are algorithmic and code, a semantic structure both linear and arbitrary, built by binary commands. Code does not have the same relationship to time as material objects, nor the same relationship to time as language. Digital data take what is immanently temporal and temporary—selfies, or light imprints of human faces—and make of those imprints codes that do not have the same relationship to time as do material objects, including persons. To have the parasocial relationship with myself that selfie practice generates, to believe that my identity is meaningfully contained in a dataset held by a social media company, is to have a conceptually altered relationship to temporality. It is to agree to put on the mask of the data-driven self.

The distinction that Frosh makes is the fluency of the act of the selfie. Coupled with Photoshop, this self-presentation becomes a curious form of self-erasure. It is a creation through amalgamated computer generation. The loss of indexicality, then, is not intrinsic to the selfie but rather habitual, usual. A selfie series such as Ai Weiwei's

is, arguably, entirely indexical; it strikes home, makes a point about his body in space and time.

Leviathan

The mask of the selfie is also built of many faces, innumerable faces. Is the selfie, then, rather than a comment on oneself, a way of building identity as cluster? A massive collaborative to create a leviathan mask? The internet is a field read by AI, and this readership significantly differs from human patterns of interpretation. AI sees by seeking matches according to dictated parameters. The selfie that is read by AI will move by specified grids of seeing.

The experience of being seen through the one-way mirror of social media, the data interface that is corralled, controlled, and viewed by social media companies' AI, while the users do *not* have parallel access to the inner workings of the algorithms that power them, is characterized by aporias, gaps between belief and materiality. It is the error term at the core of social media: we *feel* we are posting selfies to our Instagram followers, but AI is watching us more closely than our friends to gather data that in turn generate profits for social media companies.

The differences between the temporality of human watchers and AI is perhaps imperceptible to social media users. The question of how AI "watches" us is significant, but the temporal feel of a presence that sees your every post (the data-absorbing AI gaze) and its distance from the human gaze (that is limited in its attention and memory) makes the experience of social media one of temporal masking. Your best friend may not remember that you talked about buying a red dress last week, but Google knows you searched for one. Your identity always wears the mask of its history of Google searches.

Stepping back, one sees that the idea of self as that which responds to being seen by other human beings is decentered by social media's AI-driven discourse.[34] Theory of mind contends with AI in an as yet unsettled way.[35] Descartes's *Second Meditation* almost seems to suggest that a mind could be entirely separate from a vulnerable embodied subject; but because of its recourse to theological faith, it is a misreading of Descartes to apply his work to AI.[36] John Searle argues, in "Minds, Brains, and Programs," that regardless of how skilled they are, AI will not have the quality of actual mind, that is, emotion-conditioned knowledge extending from cognition of material vulnerability.[37] A computer is a material object and AI cannot exist without machines (even as it maps between them); hence AI could theoretically know its own vulnerability as an object. However, AI in social media does not at this time function through inherent knowledge of its own materially vulnerable status, and it is an open question as to whether a machine could ever become affectively aware of its machineness, that is, develop embodied mortal introspection. Or would that awareness have to be encoded into the neural network by an animate actor? Animal life, if it knows nothing else instinctively, knows its own embodied vulnerability. The rabbit in the backyard pricks its ears when a helicopter burrs overhead or when thunder claps. The helicopter's computerized flying system does not fear lightning strikes, even though it navigates around them.

The pivot of mind that is embodied and vulnerable cannot be experientially swiveled by AI but only simulated. Since Searle's Chinese room example smacks of racism, implying that the Chinese language, and by extension the Chinese mind, is the height of

otherness, I pose an example that extends from Searle's classic argument but rejects its racism.[38] Imagine a male child born in China, say, Shanghai, in 2002, to wealthy parents who are fluent in English and Mandarin. Imagine the child learns both languages, growing up bilingual. His vocabulary in either language will be somewhat less than AI programmed to translate between English and Mandarin, which will contain all known words of said languages. The young man has also picked up a smattering of Cantonese, and folklore stories told to him by a man hired to cook for the family. AI can reproduce all this knowledge, provided it is given instruction in the field of data. But it cannot inflect the knowledge with emotion—what it meant to stand in the kitchen in the late afternoon, to be fed small samples of supper because early hunger was voiced and answered in Cantonese. The vulnerable body and, arguably, the need for approval, love, and food are not part of AI but are fundamentally constitutive of animate mind. The intelligence of AI is itself a mask rather than a face.

Coiled into the embodied self is knowledge of hunger, thirst, cold, and heat. Immanuel Kant argues that we are born with a priori knowledge of space and time, that is, extension and mortality.[39] Limits, an ending in space of the body's extension, an ending in time of the body's ability to survive (i.e., vulnerability to starvation, violence, wearing out, wearing down), fundamentally constitute animate mind in time. The materiality that holds AI can, of course, be programmed to be aware of fragility, but this is different from the intrinsic vulnerability of embodiment that Kant glosses as the a priori categories of space and time. The foundation of any epistemology, for Kant, is this intrinsic and unteachable knowledge of a priori categories, space and time.

Untaught is the key here: Kant argues that intrinsic awareness of space and time cannot be taught. But AI would always, in a fundamental sense, have to be taught space-time. Whether this awareness were granted by an original program or developed through programming that allows AI to learn, it would never be innate. In other words, if we agree with Kant that space-time categories cannot be learned or taught then AI can never know them; rather AI can only learn myriad other facts and patterns that emerge secondarily from this knowledge of space-time or that point back to it. The intelligence of AI wears a mask because that composite frame is how it learns.

The self is posited by Kantian epistemology differently from Descartes, the shift to Kantian epistemology definitive of understanding what might constitute an embodied self.[40] Though Kant, racist and sexist as he was, might not want to admit it, a self grounded in vulnerability is the antithesis of the idea of the white male colonizer.[41]

Philosopher Emmanuel Levinas improves Kant's ethics by developing the theory of facing: to constitute a self one must face the other, and facing can occur only through vulnerability to the other, to time, and to embodied mortality.[42] The unmasked self is needed to face the other. In the next section, I consider what Levinas's theory of facing means through the imbrication of social media selfie practice with masking in the context of the pandemic.

Face, Mask, and Selfie in Crisis[43]

When I was completing the writing of this book, the pandemic hit the world and the country where I live, the United States, especially hard. In the time of social distancing, masking and social media took on different meanings. The health emergency injunction against spending time in an embodied way with those not living in one's

household meant that screen-to-screen contact—Skype, FaceTime, Zoom—became the norm for those lucky enough to work from home to stay safe.[44]

In this context, selfie practice became even weirder. The selfie distills identity in the pandemic in a way that is eerie, uncanny. Selfies during the pandemic reveal painfully clearly that people wear the mask of their personal economic situations. The ultrawealthy seem to feel little pain during the pandemic, while the poor suffer and die. The selfie-self in the pandemic is hyperrevealed as a capitalist self.[45] If you are rich enough, you can live out the pandemic in comfort, taking selfies along the way, showing your luxury. In this context, the selfie is a tool of articulating capitalist status. To take and post selfies during the pandemic is to articulate class boundaries harshly.

Masked

With the advent of the pandemic, one wore a face-covering mask in public; beyond that, one worked from home before a masking screen. Hans Belting's *Face and Mask* takes on a different meaning when the word *mask* indicates a life-saving device to stop the pandemic's spread. And yet, the human face is revealed within this necessary masking as all the more potent. The human face, in the pandemic, becomes something fearful. Being close enough to see a stranger's unmasked face is a risk. The masks we wear during this pandemic say that we are vulnerable, physically, even as the masks substantially protect us from illness.

What of the selfie, the screen face, that is, the face made for and by the screen? What do we see when we see the screen face and know that we cannot safely—during the pandemic—see the real face, the one that we could touch without "media" to mediate our touch? The unmanageable knowledge that being human comes with a haunting nearness to being animal (the pandemic, with its animal-to-human origin of transmission reminding us all that we are always more near the animal world than the technological) is tamped down by screens with internet connections. You are safe from getting infected when looking into the face of a human being on a screen. And yet, the face on a screen cannot give us all that we want. Or should that be worded differently—is it not the face on a screen but rather the screen face as mask? For are not screens masks?

Our screens mask us from the virus: they allow us to see each other without risking transmitting the virus. Screens allow us to maintain the illusion that when we face each other, with friendly and safe intent, it is without the subtext of possible virus transmission. The screen becomes the mask of civility through which we see each other without explicitly stating, "I will not risk exposing myself to the danger of your embodied presence." Extending from Belting, one sees how the difference of face and mask, risk and ritual, deepens as we deepen into screen time during the pandemic. Our screen faces are masked even when unmasked, the time of our embodiment put aside before and for screen time. The time of the screen, framed as fluently shifting image, is a different time.[46]

The time of the screen is the time of an incessant near pastness that strives to but never can become *now*. The screen-as-mask holds time in this odd space of absorption. The other-as-image revolves toward an echoing narcissism as we become the image for the other. The face in a self-portrait is an image, like the selfie, like the screen-self, but also it is capable of being an image with an acute self-awareness of its own troubled and troubling presence as image. The photographic self-portraits

discussed in other chapters of this book stage not only the self confronting the self but also the artist's confrontation of the limits of the image. A self-portrait can mark the artist's realization of her limits. The selfie poses as if the source of its image, the embodied self, is impossible to deplete, always vivid and moving. That is its mask, the screen's mask.

Narcissus, Afterward

Selfies should be interpreted through Rosalind Krauss's classic work on video and the aesthetics of narcissism, noted earlier. Selfie's compulsive seriality places it between video and still photography, because one selfie implies the former and the next, with the typical mode of watching selfies the quick rapid-fire response necessary to keep up in social media practice. Screen faces, selfies shifting through social media practice repetitions, lend themselves to the narcissism of video. The human face as the place of openness, malleability, and vulnerability, the screen and selfie mask with stasis, invulnerability. If the self-portrait distills vulnerability into a visual memento of the self confronting the self, revealing to others that she is not immortal but vulnerable and marked by time, the selfie with its video-like catalogs of repetitions (yesterday's selfie, today's selfie, tomorrow's selfie, *and so on*) conjures a mask of invulnerability. The selfie states, "I will keep appearing, producing myself," while the self-portrait marks the self's confrontation with its mortal limits. If Amelia Jones argues that the self-portrait is about eternal return, it may be rather that the self-portrait accepts the *loss* of the ability to return, that its eternity emerges through this facing of loss as the core constituent of temporality.[47] The selfie is never about return. The selfie is about moving away from points of return, jettisoning the desire for return, embracing what Krauss insightfully sees as video's centerless press toward self-mirroring in linearly imagined time.

Uncanny Selves

The "uncanny valley" refers to the phenomenon of human-like, lifelike objects that are eerie and unsettling precisely because they approximate a living person but are not a living person. The mask of the screen secures us in an uncanny plateau, at once human and inhuman.[48] The screen face, the selfie, is by definition an image of a person alive at the time of the image's creation. There are examples, discussed elsewhere in this book, of people who die taking high-risk selfies, but when the shot itself is snapped, the selfie-subjects are still living, taking pictures of themselves.[49] But the uncanny modality of screen-life is itself an example if not precisely of the uncanny valley then rather of an uncanny plateau.

The uncanny valley, as Masahiro Mori defines the concept, is a space wherein that which is not living and human comes so close to appearing living and human that it frightens and chills.[50] With a teddy bear that looks somewhat anthropomorphized but even still unlike a human child compared with a doll that looks rather too much like a human child, it's the doll that is uncanny, the doll that chills. This is the uncanny valley. A doll new to the market —Moxie—uses AI to perform human-like actions and goes deeper into the uncanny valley.[51] Moxie is touted as a tool parents can use to educate their child so that they, the parents, need not be present with the child. This is uncanny use of AI. Likewise, a screen face, a human face masked by a screen,

also is at once living and not living. Here I mean a face seen on a computer, tablet, or smartphone screen. A print photograph can certainly chill with its likeness to a human face, but it is marked by an awareness of its own materiality, a picture in a frame.[52] A screen face, as Krauss indicates, and here I include the selfie face as a screen face, presents a formal unawareness of its strangeness, which makes it all the stranger. The uncanny plateau of the screen is the flatness of the screen, the absolute evenness of screen presence. It is motivated by the sense that the screen is *almost* a frame, in the traditional sense of a framed image, but as Krauss notes this frame is never set.[53]

Tablets, phones, and computers are subject to time as objects. They enter time. They too will become trash. But the images we view on them are in a different category of stillness and disposability. The selfie replaces itself regularly, as is the custom and need of selfie practice. The screen face of social media is itself uncannily lifelike, but not living, in its responsiveness to our hands' actions.[54]

When you look at Cindy Sherman's Instagram selfies, it's up to you to scroll past as much as you like, and so you do. Scroll on. Selfie images move quickly; you don't confront them, they don't confront you. Rather you slide through, the images glissade away as your hands manipulate the screen. The selfie is a plateau between vividness and defunctness, bearing through its mobile frame of screen an eerie relationship to time. The digital image, as code data, is not attached to any particular screen. If the screen I'm using here stops functioning I can just get a new screen. It's all trash.

Time We Have Wasted

A paradoxical aesthetic of trash, of time as the incessant discard, is the implicit temporality of selfies. As they ride their uncanny plateau, selfies feed capitalism's ultimate aesthetic: waste.[55] The temporality of the selfie on its uncanny plateau of screen is that of the always immanent discard, the unacknowledged cliff (of throwing away the old, the throwback) toward which capitalist time inevitably moves. The horizon of the selfie's temporality is the horizon of trash, not a landfill but just that which no one is expected to look at again. The discarded mask.

This sublime disappearance is the lure of capitalist time, increasingly frantic circles of production and consumption. That which is made to fall away, made to vanish, is part of modernity and has a privileged link to capitalist discourse of circulation.[56] The waste of capitalist production is connected to the urge to continuously *use* time, as opposed to other economic systems and other systems of value that might view time as something other than sellable and spendable.[57] In late capitalism, as Philippe Ariès makes the persuasive case, death becomes invisible, off-scene, hidden.[58] Alongside its erasure of death, contemporary capitalism also hides its waste. That which is produced itself becomes waste, in places mostly kept out of view of everyone but the most impoverished.

The mask of capitalism hides this wasteland of late-stage capitalism, hides it specifically through beliefs that time must be *spent* to produce products of some kind, whether that be steel, oil, cars, computers, smartphones, cell towers, jails, houses, or social media. This is a capitalist idea of time, or, as Katharina Pistor argues, a code of capital.[59] The aesthetic of waste is the hidden horizon, the vanishing point, of capitalist time.[60] We know it is there, but instead we look at its mask.

Selfie practice is built on this same capitalist habit of seeing time as product, even as selfie manifests as the always new mask. Each day's selfie asserts its necessity while

quietly pushing last week's selfie into oblivion, the digital wastelands. Selfie practice, as formed by social media platforms, conforms to capitalist time: place the product, throw it away; sell the product, then throw out the refuse; put on the mask, discard it after use.

The secret of mortality, the secret of trash, is the selfie's ultimate secret, behind the mask. Keeping capitalist time, the selfie becomes retouched, an image to discard rather than a point of return. The selfie-self becomes trash, in its position vis-à-vis conceptual time.[61] Death and waste, twin specters, pushed off scene by late-stage capitalism, haunt selfie practice as the invisible or obscene (literally *off scene*) inverse of the obsessive production of self-images, what the mask of selfie covers.

Into this space of death's disavowal and simultaneous continuous creation that is social media selfie practice, the pandemic moves strangely. You cannot catch the virus through social media—social media (for epidemiology) wears the safest of masks, a screen: distance is built in. And yet, selfies also are painfully inadequate ways of publicly "facing" the pandemic. Popular Instagram selfie practitioners, during the crisis in spring and summer of 2020, showcase selfies that emphasize their sexual attractiveness.[62] There is, perhaps, little else to do with selfie practice but look sexy, and yet the emblematization of self-sexualization during a pandemic feels hollow, misaligned with the suffering experienced by those for whom economic insecurity renders vulnerable to the disease.[63] A pandemic has difficulty being displayed in the world of selfie practice. Instead, it shows Kendall Jenner frolicking in a bikini in crystal blue ocean waves, a selfie posted in April 2020, as pandemic deaths surged in the United States. The smooth and downward slope of invisibility that capitalist time posits as its horizon, unacknowledged mortality and waste, can hardly be indicated by selfie practice because selfie practice is the emblematization of capitalist time.

Whom Do I Haunt? Beyond the Mask

The photographic self-portrait tests the meaning of seeing: it entwines the haunting gazes of others with the gaze of the photographer herself. The selfie, by contrast, masks the social meanings of human seeing for it externalizes the gazes of others to the always already set template of social media platform AI. Rather than taking a self-portrait photograph in which others see us through our histories, the selfie literalizes the mask of others' gazes.[64] It cannot be haunted because it entwines no gazes but instead separates them into numerically punctuated views and followers. Each look at a selfie is tracked and turned into a number by AI and shaped as the disciplinary grid of social media within which the selfie practitioner performs. In this sense, the selfie is mask where the self-portrait is face.

The self-portrait brings into the photograph the loved, mourned, hated, and feared other, a haunted condition. As a site of fear, it commands ontological terrain that selfie practice cannot. As Paul Frosh makes clear, selfie is a visual online chat.[65] The temporality of the selfie is the time of deferral, the time of chat. It is not the event that happens but the chatter around events. It is the mask that time can put on, rather than a facing of mortal temporality. The selfie emerges from and anticipates more of the same. This defines selfie practice. The paradigm does not bring the viewer into one intensified moment of seeing but instead disperses the viewer's gaze across multiple masks on the social media page like items on a store shelf, regularized by capitalist bureaucracy.

Blindness and Insight

The blind field of social media selfies is algorithmic gazing.[66] The selfie disperses the blind field away from the picture and scatters it across the media platform. The *secret about a secret* that Diane Arbus perceptively discerns as the core of a photograph self-portrait is the self's confrontation with the self.[67] In a selfie, the secret is numerical assemblage, the algorithmic gaze of the social media platform.[68]

A month into the pandemic in the United States, a Kylie Jenner Instagram selfie shows her natant in her private pool in late April 2020. But the meaning of the photograph is not the hidden recesses of shadow around the pool's walled areas: those look as predictable as the pool and the woman in it. The blind field is the algorithm seeing the image. The mystery of Instagram and Facebook—the hidden, blind field—is the algorithmic gaze that creates and shapes them. We know—we are promised by the format—that we will see more and more and more of the people whose selfie posts we follow. That's the format of social media. Hence there is little sense in the way that Barthes poignantly describes a photograph as "just so much and no more" in selfie. Here, there is no limit.[69] Instead, the temporality of selfie practice is endless offering. You can see more of Kylie tomorrow! The mask repeats itself continuously.

The temporal arc of the photograph bends toward longing, as Barthes suggests.[70] But the selfie is about fulfilled longing. *If you want to see more of me, I will show you more and more and more*, is the phatic call of the selfie. In the selfie is the return of the image to the viewer, the opposite temporal pull to the self-portrait (with the return of the viewer to the image). The selfie, it returns to you, always another one posted for you in the uncut seriality of social media platforms. In the self-portrait a time of self-confrontation is staged. Time is cut by the gesture of the self-portrait. Selfie doesn't make that gesture of the cut. It offers another look *soon*, in a few days, a few hours. In contrast to serial works, selfie postings are framed not by self-referentiality but by a posture of ignoring earlier posts, treating them as defunct. If Kylie posts herself wearing a see-through dress, it's not a reference to an earlier shot in her underwear, it's just her building her brand.

Certainly one can turn to Cindy Sherman's Instagram page to see a large number of distorted selfies—using digitized distortion as opposed to Ellen Carey's and Lucas Samaras's analog distortions—and yet despite the use of distortion, her selfies on Instagram do not build to a series because their aesthetic is never about origin or telos, nor even the ironization thereof. They appear instead as random twerks. Does it matter that there is less labor and almost zero *chance* involved in deploying photo-editing apps?[71] The selfie eschews contingency even as it boasts of it: each selfie supposedly shows a contingent moment in the poster's life, but the life is staged for the shot.

If identity is a haunted frame, wherein the gazes of others echo but also are contested by some kernel we inductively claim as *myself*, naming this unique embodied relationship we each have to our experience of the temporal, material world, selfie places a frozen mask across the haunted place of self, unhaunting the terrain. Sherman's funhouse mirror selfies do not chill in the way of Samaras's experiments in self-distortion. In the haunted frame of the self-portrait, the self haunted by protean aspects of personal and social history—the construct of *I saw myself seeing myself*—is comparable to the distortions of a convex mirror, a popular optical prop in early modern portraiture. Selfie is mask, as it were, in a flat mirror, straight up, unhaunted.

The selfie is mask, an emblem standing for a temporally dissociative and dissociated self. As a student comments, looking at other friends' selfies can be "like watching a coming-of-age movie with all your friends in it but you're not."[72] This experience of being not *in* the coming-of-age movie displayed on others' social media feeds reveals a gambit of social media temporality: that you are either not there or *in danger* of not being there. The selfie is the mask you wear to be there.

FOMO, or fear of missing out, is integral to selfie temporality, constitutive of selfie time, and is the threat of exclusion from one's own episteme. Outside selfie-world, it is hard to escape your own temporal realm. To appear in, to experience, the frame of time that one inhabits as an embodied entity is nearly ineluctable. You awaken in a specific and nonfungible time-space, say, your bedroom in an apartment in Houston. As an embodied entity, you cannot physically be in a bed in an apartment in Houston and also be in, say, a motel in rural Wyoming at the same time. You cannot avoid engaging time's episteme from a specifically grounded location unless you take extreme measures, maybe drugs that snuff your awareness.[73] Even then, unless you are entirely knocked out, you will know that "I am here, in rural Wyoming, in a motel room, stoned." Time's continuity around you is both painful, for it is inalterable, and sheltering, for it is inalienable.

By contrast, the selfie-self can "be" (and this ontology is friable, unstable) in a bed in Houston and in a motel room in Wyoming, or anywhere. Its time is not fragmented but friable along multiple splits, rimose, because its space is fungible. The frail and fleeting ontology of the selfie-self occurs not where it is taken but where it is seen. *The selfie is the selfie not when the image is shot but when the image is seen as a selfie*. This is definitive of the selfie-self.

The selfie mask has a thousand imperceptible friable *flakes* of time that cast the self into temporal dispersal. Your selfie-self is encouraged and pressured to appear in a large array of venues across space and time—to be in Wyoming, Houston, Bangkok, Mérida, Seoul, wherever you can cop a look from a social media participant. Though you can have a private Instagram page with only a few selected followers, that is a sidebar to the strategy of social media platforms. Given that the overarching goal of social media companies is to make money, the ethos of the platforms is toward multiplication of participants and exponential multiplication of participation moments. As in any capitalist venture, the goal of social media is quantitative, not qualitative. But in social media, because the product is itself a performative intervention into the temporal episteme, the temporality of quantity becomes the core of the experience.

The temporality of quantity is dissociative: like watching a movie of your own experience always threatening to exclude you. Whereas temporality outside social media is the only part of experience that cannot exclude us from our own temporal episteme, as "time and the hour run through the roughest day," selfie time constantly threatens to keep us out: that is the temporality of FOMO, powered by AI.[74] The temporality of the algorithmic gaze is not embodied but it surveys evidence of embodiment. It is not mortal, nor either immortal, but rather surveys the struggle of embodied, mortal acts.

The Fractured Mask

The time of algorithmic gazing is neither symbolic nor performative. Instead, it infuses a kind of "crazing," borrowing the term here from pottery glazing, into time's

episteme. Experiencing time as an embodied self, one is cut by time. Regardless of my choices and decisions, yesterday is ineradicably beyond my reach. But in selfie time, which seems to emerge from human gazes but actually, structurally, is powered by algorithmic gazing, my selfie mask is filled with craze-lines, rimose, shallow faults, through which I can—theoretically—scroll back and encounter the episteme of whatever day it was that someone took that selfie I want to see. This fungible torque has the effect of a mask always in danger of collapse, as is a fired vessel with a crazed glaze. Selfie practice shapes a weak mask because it covers and hides the force of embodied temporality.

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7 Celebrity Self-Fashioning

A parallel showing the nonintersecting trajectories of selfie and self-portrait emerges by looking at American photographer Ellen Carey's 1978–1987 series of Polaroid self-portraits, in contrast to contemporary selfie practice. The self-portraits are stained glass windows of selfhood (figures 7.1, 7.2, 7.3, 7.4, and 7.5). Created by manipulating a Polaroid's oversaturated colors, Carey's self-portraits are hybrid images, prints that explore and manifest the Polaroid as a printmaking machine, the image of the self as a conduit to an understanding of machine temporality. And yet, beyond the trope of the machine, Carey's Polaroid self-portraits evoke stained glass windows in their aesthetic. They draw from the idea of the image as a window into mortal time. In these images, the face of the photographer becomes a proxy through which the dense color swirl of Polaroid, as time's signifier, plays. The spectral frame of the face in a self-portrait encircled by halolike spheres articulates Polaroid's printing process. The face here looks vulnerably human in contrast to the printed Polaroid's uncanny color swirl. The image posits the human face as subsumed into the printmaking process that is the photograph. Yet the photographer does not look machinelike in this conjunction. She does not have cyborg face. On the contrary, the images are delicately and poignantly accurate to the contours of a human face, a look of slight exhaustion, shadows haunting the photographer.

Here is not an exposition of the nullity of the self, but exposure of its vulnerability. If pushed, the stained glass window analogy arrives at a postreligious mourning for the dream of religion, the transubstantiation of the human. It is a frightening dream of self that Carey's self-portraits realize, the self fragile and vulnerable to the temporality of the machine. But the self is not subsumed, here, into the machine, as in selfie practice. Instead, in Carey's work to see is the human act that subsumes the machine. And to see the self—to be a self seeing herself—is the ultimate resistance to the machine's engulfment. Carey's self-portraits are not made to be seen AI, and AI existed in the late 20th century. They are made to be seen by human beings, sifting through the mesh of technology what remains of the human. They are, then, photographic self-portraits that risk the self, that throw identity at technology not in a luddite fashion but to test the difference.

These Polaroid self-portraits trouble tropes of the intact self, but they do not negate the premise of embodied identity. Rather, the images are investigations of the boundaries and limits of self as embodied form. Her self-portraits test time and identity. The swirl of colors and geometric patterns manifest as temporal patterns, the slippage of time across the body, leaving intact something like a core self skewed by temporality's

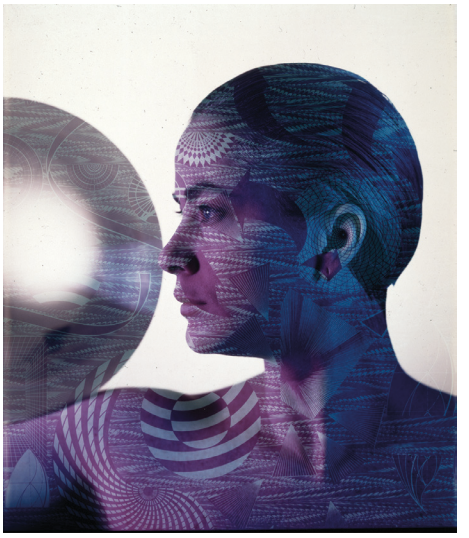

Figure 7.1 Ellen Carey, *Self-Portrait*, 1987, Polaroid color print-unique, 24 × 20 in. Private collection. Courtesy of the artist.

Figure 7.2 Ellen Carey, *Self-Portrait*, 1983, Polaroid color print-unique, 24 × 20 in. Private collection. Courtesy of the artist.

swerve. Carey's large-format Polaroid self-portraits offer a template for understanding the temporal friction of merging identity with technologies of image reproduction. At the time of its production, late 20th century, pre–social media, Carey's work was interpreted as posthuman.[1] The photographs explore the effect of the printing

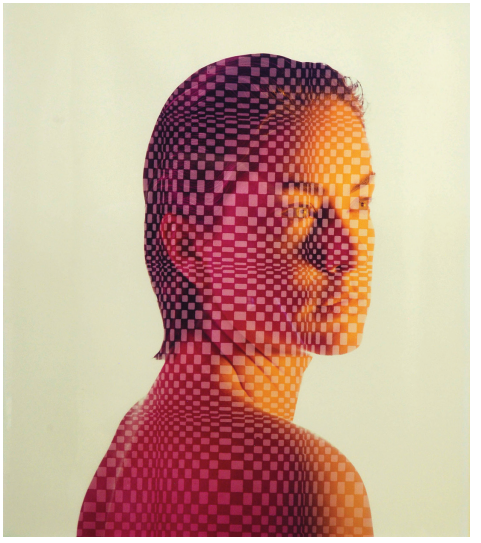

Figure 7.3 Ellen Carey, *Self-Portrait*, 1985, Polaroid color print-unique, 24 × 20 in. Private collection. Courtesy of the artist.

Figure 7.4 Ellen Carey, *Self-Portrait*, 1986, Polaroid color print-unique, 24 × 20 in. Private collection. Courtesy of the artist.

technology of the Polaroid, skewing the centrality of the self, marking the self as emblem almost lost within the grasp of this printmaking machine (figures 7.1, 7.2, 7.3, 7.4, and 7.5). Eerily hypnotic patterns submerge the photographer's face. An image taken underwater typifies the immersive feel of all these self-portraits, the embodied

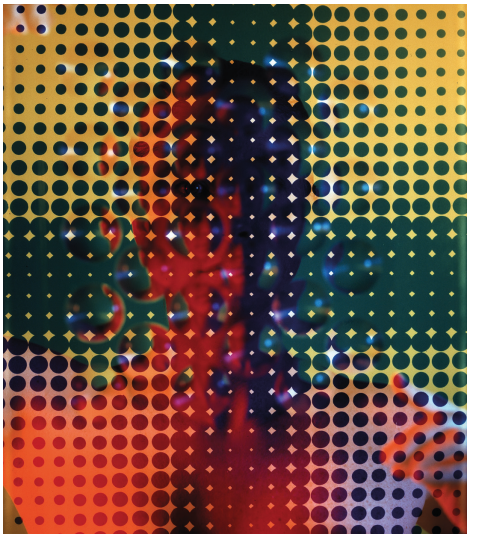

Figure 7.5 Ellen Carey, *Self-Portrait*, 1987, Polaroid color print-unique, 24 × 20 in. Private collection. Courtesy of the artist.

self almost drowning, covered up, by the materiality of photography. Carey's series of self-portraits contemplates what was then considered the postmodern condition and what we may now think of as the proto-postmodern.[2] As Walter Benjamin makes the case, the photographic era is that in which our way of seeing is swallowed by the machine's way of creating image.[3] This prescient if incomplete insight indicates social media's way of training us to see. For if the photographic era meant that everything could be photographed and reproduced as image, the era of social media is about image-coding. Carey's self-portraits are not precursors to social media selfies but rather harbingers, augurs, even warnings, of the fragility of embodied identity enmeshed with machine seeing. For the revolution of selfie-self is not new ways of making images but instead to cede to machine seeing, the temporal shift by which to be a self is to be seen by AI.

The distance within the self, past and future, is the expansive temporal frame that Carey's self-portrait photographs access as they register mortal time as part of the self. In her self-portraits, the temporal episteme is not suppressed but engaged: the self confronting the self along the cut or fault of mortal embodiment. Whereas the self in Carey's self-portraits is thrown against the machine it functions as an emblem of need, translated into image-sign that accentuates the body's mortal time. Selfies disavow this problem, leveraging repetition to smooth the jagged edge of embodied identity in time.

Selfie's aesthetic erases or elides the visibility of the technology that powers social media, even as it depends on AI. Through depicting and manifesting anamorphosis of identity, Carey's work mobilizes the ache of embodied temporality, precisely because it confronts and makes visible the technology of its own making (figure 7.6). The colors and patterns that coruscate her self-portraits are the marks of a clock, along the body's parameters. Even as the images evoke eerie postindustrial humanity, they

Figure 7.6 Ellen Carey, *Self-Portrait*, 1984, dye diffusion transfer print, 25 ¾ × 21 ⅞ in. Amon Carter Museum of American Art, Fort Worth, Texas. Courtesy of the artist.

are anchored in the human gaze with its sorrow and longing, its patterns of marking and retreating from marks. It is precisely through the confrontation with the machine that Carey's self-portraits succeed as self-portraits, interrogations of identity in temporality. This interrogation of the machine is, by contrast, contrary to the function of selfie practice. For the machine of seeing, in selfie practice on social media, is *not* the camera but AI, algorithmic seeing, that predigests the image and sends it to those human participants who will feed on it. Carey's large-format, square prints are built for embodied subjects to stand before; they beckon the human eye through the human body.

And yet, from Carey's self-portrait Polaroids there extends a sororial connection to Juliana Huxtable's 21st-century experiments in color, form, and self. Carey's works look like the mergence of the human with the machine: they manipulate the image, and they are photographic images of the self by the self. But it is in the similarity to selfies that the differences are clear, and those differences emerge along the rubric of temporality. Carey's Polaroid self-portraits stage an encounter of the self with the machine of seeing and printing, the camera, the Polaroid. They do not stage a subsummation into the algorithm, which is the gesture of every selfie, regardless of the intentions of its poster. The temporality of the embodied self is revealed as fragile, vulnerable, even damaged, in Carey's searing self-portraits, whereas the gambit of the selfie moves toward the taut plastic surface of the photo-editing app. Carey's 2001 *Stopping Down* series acts as a turning point, a hollowing out of the frame of the self-image, as if already (at the century's turn) mourning the self-evacuations that become the mode of self-fashioning in social media in the century's first two decades.

Time and the Image

In this book, I am not arguing that selfies are aesthetically inferior to self-portraits, but that they are temporally different, existing within a skewed temporal episteme; that skew is the expression of capitalism's harnessing of algorithms. As I turn from Carey's late 20th-century self-portrait photographs, recall the algorithmically produced and monitored squares of social media templates for selfies.

The pulsated time sealed by *social media feeds* imbricates a shadowland of identity. This can produce uncannily discordant results. As I write in summer 2020, the Instagram feeds of Kylie and Kendall Jenner, among the most virulently popular selfie creators, do not reflect the crisis of the pandemic in their country, the United States. Kylie is to be praised for having once used her fame to speak out to her cohort—young people—to tell them to social distance at the beginning of the pandemic. But her daily selfie practice does not indicate ongoing contention with crisis. Why should she show this crisis that kills those without the capital (wealth) to secure themselves safely away from harm? She is a celebrity, not a public servant. And yet, looking at the Jenner sisters' Instagram accounts in a time of pandemic and seeing these polished selfies—lounging by the pool, frolicking in the ocean, sunning in the desert—is a dissonant experience. It emphasizes the temporal limits of the selfie-self. The selfie-self cannot easily go to the front lines of a crisis, because the temporality of crisis is too precise. A crisis is always what is happening now. You can't escape it—that's why it's a crisis. Selfie practice by contrast eschews, turns from, crisis. Sealed in their images, the Jenner sisters have no truck with cataclysm.

As I write in this chapter about celebrity selfie takers, I do not comment on the human beings—influencers—discussed, but rather their selfie personae. I point to their avatars on social media—the selfie-selves "Kylie" and "Kendall," for example—that exemplify how social media shapes identity. The sisters are experts at this game. If they are not the game's creators, they play it exceptionally well.

Following the selfie's key injunction to *be popular*, to be the capitalist product that sells most by attracting to itself the largest numbers of viewers, I stumbled onto the numerically popular Instagram of someone who at first appeared a doppelgänger from my youth: Kaia Gerber, with a face uncannily similar to that of her mother, Cindy Crawford, supermodel of my adolescent shopping mall days.[4] It was strange to see these two Instagram personae faces juxtaposed as only social media platforms can juxtapose: making *all* image sets comparable as "like to like." Looking at Crawford's Instagram, awash with throwback images, nostalgia of middle-age celebrity, I felt *thrown back* to the shopping malls of my junior high life, mercenary spaces rife with pictures of Crawford in her heyday. It was not a happy reverie.

Insta-Frame

As John Tagg notes, the photograph serves as a "disciplinary frame," implicitly—and at times explicitly—forcing populations to adhere to rigorous image-based norms.[5] For my adolescence, Cindy Crawford the *image* functioned as a disciplinary frame. This discipline exemplifies the wastefulness of capitalism—on women in particular—to look like a picture.[6] The return of Crawford's face, through her daughter's numerically more successful Instagram selfie practice, is uncanny.[7] Whereas I might lament an adolescence spent in the thrall of the mall, to see the replication of sexist imagery

with a deeper bite in Instagram now drives home the force of selfie practice.[8] The disciplinary force of Instagram is extolled by some feminists as a way for women to assume agency by taking pictures of themselves.[9] And yet this theory leaves to one side the sharpness of Instagram's bite. Gazing at Crawford's poster advertisements in the shopping mall, your teenage self was discomfited. But then you left the mall and, to some extent, put the image from your mind. Instagram—the selfie world—abides by a different temporality. Instagram is always there, you are endlessly beckoned to the next post. The post arises on your digital gadget, it stays in your hand. Its time is imperative: look at me. But also its time is inconsequential, not intended for contemplation.

Blue Eye

Toni Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye* contends with precisely this paradigm: the image's capacity to create the illusion that we will be made pure and whole by matching ourselves to a screen image. Morrison plumbs the particularly racist and sexist violence of this translation.[10] While Morrison's novel describes movies, one may see that selfie practice is closer to movies than to self-portraiture; selfie is an always shifting screen of desired identity performance. The selfie-self is not grafted from the self-portrait, rather it is the scion of star-studded movies and shopping mall advertisement posters. The selfie is the answer to those movies and posters—a way of saying, "Look, I can approximate the advertiser's pitch with my own body, face, my own life."

It may be something of an overreach to suggest that selfie practice is the equivalent of Morrison's emblematic bluest eye, where the image's myth is destroying the person who pursues it, but even so the essential parallel holds. The selfie is what we create as a result of staring at advertising that tells us to look like advertising. Morrison's novel links this urge—to become the advertisement we see—with death, fatality, and also with incest. For Morrison, this fatality inheres in the falseness, the sexist and racist vision, of the advertising image, and the corrosive effect of that falseness when it is drawn upon in an attempt to cure real human suffering.

The time of the advertising image is never mortal time; its blue eye instead watches a horizon we cannot reach with our vulnerable bodies. It marks an appeal to hypothetical endless circulation. As I pondered Crawford and her daughter Gerber's Instaselves, I was struck by the eerie poignancy of capitalism's hidden cliff, that drop-off into visual wasteland. Crawford's Instagram sported the occasional 1980s or 1990s advertisement shot, relics, *reliquaries* actually, relics of a saint of advertising, whereas her daughter's Instagram sports the supposedly *brand-new*. Yet the old is new and the new old: Instagram selfies trend toward the same cliff of the defunct image, the relic held dear by a smaller number of followers each day, week, year. In its full deployment of capitalist time as the time of unacknowledged, disavowed waste, selfie practice acts as a kind of bluest eye, a fusion with myriad screen selves that cannot be sustained in embodied practice. The political activist landscape of selfie practice, then, is a tough sell.

New Pages: Magazine Selfies

Turning to Martine Gutierrez's *Indigenous Woman*, a handmade print magazine, one sees the self-portrait deployed as political critique. Gutierrez's work in print media

and on Instagram are linked, as is de rigueur for young artists now. Gutierrez's work critiques the racist disciplinary frame of the fashion shot. And yet her works in print and gallery space are radically different in force of critique from the view of those identical works on her Instagram. In the museum space, *Indigenous Woman* is displayed as an exquisitely crafted book. Pressing generic boundaries to their limits, Gutierrez's work brilliantly unpacks and undoes the generic constraints of white, usually male, curatorial practice.[11] The faux magazine, or rather the hyperreal magazine *Indigenous Woman*, contains a series of gorgeous and fantastically critical of white domination self-portraits of the artist, who is an indigenous American trans woman. Each painstakingly staged self-portrait in the magazine deconstructs a genre of white-oppressive looking at indigenous women.[12] The pages to be displayed have to be turned by a curator and set beneath glass.[13] In the Fralin Museum of Art in Charlottesville, Virginia, where I saw the work, my colleague Hannah Cattarin turned to a new page every few days, keeping the magazine beneath vitrine glass. The work stages resistance to white ways of seeing but also requires constant curatorial interaction, held in an ironically passive position, literally under the curator's hands, as the pages must be turned by the curator so that museumgoers can see different vistas. Indigenous works in the hands of white curators is a long sordid story of whites using indigenous pieces in violative ways.[14] Gutierrez's *Indigenous Woman* cuts to the heart of this tragedy and refuses to be used as a token of indigenous presence, resisting such use through the complex genre-bending act of this magazine composed entirely of self-portraits. Her magazine *Indigenous Woman* is a self-portrait tour de force.

But the same images, drawn from the same work, posted on the artist's Instagram have a different effect.[15] On social media, they are almost illegible as self-portraits of a trans woman, their queer resistance smoothed by Instagram's algorithmic grid. Gutierrez looks, in the dematerialized medium of code-as-image on social media feeds, nearly indistinguishable from a straight, non-race-specific woman. Cyborg face takes over; her doe-eyed beauty and lithe sexiness are all you see. This submission is not the artist's intention, but it is inevitable with Instagram as the medium.

Trans artist Juliana Huxtable similarly uses photo-editing apps that queer and estrange her self-portraits on Instagram, and yet even in shots that show the young artist with greenish skin or several breasts the effect is of noticing the artist's beauty and sexiness.[16] Merging a cisgender or trans woman's face with an animal is a well-established trope of Instagram selfies. (Jennifer Lopez as a fawn is a previously noted example.) Huxtable's pushing the envelope of animality barely registers as political resistance in Instagram world.[17] And yet, her works that have sold to New York City's Metropolitan Museum of Art show clearly how her self-portraits are a form of resistance to racism and heterosexism.

The disciplinary frame of social media holds all works the same, displayed through the same rubric of coded digitized image; through this grid—as Instagram is a regularized, immobile grid—we see not resistance but compliance. There is no way to *not* comply with the grid that social media offers (while still participating), unless we ourselves are social media programmers and CEOs and remake the platform. And if we are owners of social media platforms, our goal is to maximize profits. This returns us to the regularized grid that is the optimal frame for capitalist generation of profits because it corrals people into binary (code is binary, as is capitalism, *to buy or not to buy*) choices. Buy or don't buy translates, in selfies, to look or don't look.

Rosalind Krauss compares the modernist grid to the Renaissance perspective revolution in ways of seeing, and she is deeply insightful here.[18] The modernist grid is a response to a shift in seeing just as was perspective geometry. The grid responds to the gridding of populace—the making of an always visible, trackable populace. Social media aesthetics internalize and make rigid this grid, with the yes–no binary steps of code, with the algorithmic eye of data surveillance and surveillance data. Agnes Martin's modernist art, illuminated by Krauss, leveraged a compositionally transcendent critique of the small boxes citizens are compressed to inhabit in modernity, social media's grid. The small boxes of the selfies we endlessly supply to this grid do not resist or critique the management of populations that is at the core of contemporary capitalism. Instead, through a kind of soft violence, the small boxes bring that management ever deeper into our lives.

After Agnes

By the numbers, people love to look at the Kardashian-Jenner sisters. It might seem that their popularity is attributable to the Kardashians' selling of sex, showing butts and boobs in ways that titillate. Katie Warfield, however, perceptively suggests that these selfies mix up and skew who is a prostitute (i.e., a body for exchange) and who is not for sale (a mother, according to Warfield, the virgin-whore dichotomy displaced with matron-whore).[19] What actually sells the Kardashian-Jenner selfies is this paradoxically sleek matronliness—a maternal, sexy vibe. What Kim and Kylie offer in their selfie practice is not unattainable beauty and sexiness but instead sexiness smoothed of its threat through cosmetic procedures and photo-editing apps and blended with the sororal and maternal. We are encouraged that we can look like them, because their look is blatantly fabricated. The sisters' selfies play up a vision of fertility. Their selfie empire is built through this subtle infusion of motherliness.

Kylie's cosmetics empire was launched via social media.[20] But it is also dependent on motherliness: her makeup is marketed as if it were a way to help and nurture the followers who buy her products. Her pregnancy at age 19 defines her celebrity, as her claim that she created the business Kylie Cosmetics to give to her daughter solidifies the maternal vibe. The selfies posted by the Kardashian-Jenner sisters act as eerie balms. They tell you that if you look your best (you don't need to be a classic beauty), love will see you. They tell you that mothers love their children, and so you are loved even if *your* mother does not show it.[21] They deploy the photographic image in its reproductive capacity.[22] Their selfies welcome you in, with a tasteless but also shiny and nonjudgmental vibe. They tell the viewer, "You can stay in this image not because you can really enter the space of it but because nothing in the image contests your view."

The Kardashians and Jenners do not offer sex in a scary way; despite their hyping up clichés of hyperfeminine sexiness, their sexuality is presented as antiseptic, plastic, ultrafiltered doll selfies in which the "influencer" appears barely different from a doll.[23] The idealized self as a doll-self brings selfie practice into that boundary zone that Sherry Turkle discusses in *Alone Together*—where social media not only is comparable to but indeed *is* interaction with robots (insofar as AI runs social media).[24] In this sphere of algorithmic seeing, it is not surprising that a look similar to a cyborg is sought: the young woman's face becomes unknowable but

also unobjectionable transformed through photo editing into a doll's face, smooth as plastic.

More remarkable than the impression that the Kardashian-Jenners' fame is based on nullity, a kind of epiphany moment of capital ex nihilo, is the hard reality that, born to wealth, they have become astronomically more wealthy by circulating their own images as product.[25] Their selfies are not a set of different products; rather they are all one endless product that consumers, or social media followers, purchase through the proxy of transitional objects of cosmetics and other personal care items sold by these influencers. Followers are sold the idea of becoming friends with them. Through the magic of capitalist exchange, cosmetic and personal care objects deliver to consumers the product that is actually Kardashian-Jenner selfies.

Millennial Kylie Jenner has grown far richer than her Gen X sister Kim Kardashian West by marketing the product of self through Instagram. This packaging of the selfie-self engages an endless mode of a capitalism-produced self.[26] Influencers produce an amalgamation of identity-as-image product that promulgates a feeling of intimacy, a familial vibe, among consumers buying online. Feeling as if they were buying goods from friends, social media users purchase the pleasure of capitalism's obfuscation. The feeling of moving outside capitalist machinations—not, say, going to Lancôme, Sephora, or whatever cosmetic company is at your local mall, but instead buying from your social media "friend" Kylie—is at once an expression of the pain of capitalist social space (no one enjoys a strip mall) but also a poignant dupe. The way to buy Kylie is to sign up to be fed her Instagram, to keep seeing pictures of her, so many selfies that you forget you've never met her.

Crossing Boundaries

Kylie Jenner is adept at using social media's illusory crossing of wealth and class boundaries to sell her cosmetic products. As Jenner's wealth, contrasting with her followers' general lack thereof, indicates, social media does not actually restructure oppressive capitalist class divisions. To the contrary, it solidifies them. But to users it can *feel* as if social media offers equal access to spaces of wealth and privilege. This is because traditional capitalism is energized by spatial partitioning that dictates where you can go according to how wealthy you are—what neighborhood, and so on—whereas social media creates the illusion of being able to peer into multiple social landscapes.

Selfie practice, as controlled by the social media companies that own the platforms, dissolves identity into numbers (the most likes *is* the best selfie, as the only system of merit that social media can offer is that of quantity), hence the selfie dissolves time into discrete, equal-sized posts of a derivative self, a self-*ie*, a diminutive of self. Jenner is exemplary of this aspect of the selfie. Having begun her social media career as a teenager, she earns extraordinary sums by posting selfies as a means of selling her cosmetics and by endorsing others' products, using her social media presence to market her persona primarily to young women. Her approximately 1.5 million followers on social media are the customers for her products, mostly sold online. Her deployment of time is key.

By taking selfies every day and by circulating images in this uncanny boundary zone of the commercial sold as personal, Jenner becomes the youngest self-made billionaire yet.[27] Her selfies prepare the follower to desire the products on display on

the body and face of Jenner. The personal and the commercial are, in selfies created by Jenner, entirely fused. The commercial is the personal, and the personal makes the commercial feel authentic in the eyes of Jenner's followers.

On the Kylie Cosmetics website, in early winter 2020, appears a picture of a heavily maquillaged young woman holding a sweet-faced toddler, that is, Jenner and her daughter. This image—maternal, familial—contrasts markedly with, say, a contemporary Lancôme website. Consumers feel as if they know Jenner, because they follow her on Instagram. Repeatedly. Repetition is essential because without it, the illusion of being part of Jenner's life will dissipate quickly. If you stop following her on Instagram you will realize that she doesn't know you exist.

The marbling or braiding among sociality, familiality, and social media creates a blurred zone where friendship and family become apparent products for sale via manipulation of the affect of time. Consider Jenner's selfies while pregnant. The space between viewer and image is folded back into the image in these selfies: they cannot exist in a context in which they might not be seen. She is watching us watching her. The gap between viewer and viewed is instated in the image, which does not suture the gap but dramatizes it. Jenner is not creating an image through which the self confronts the self; she does not become vulnerable through this image but instead presents a sidelong glance displaying her pregnant but still hot physique. Her gaze is for the algorithm of social media, not a human interlocutor, and certainly not for herself.

This feeling of intertwined "sharing" is the bedrock of selfie practice even as the overwhelming majority of the followers of influencers are completely invisible to the wealthy influencers they follow on Instagram. Even so, because selfie practice is built on the touted ideal of mutual sharing it opens an affective space unlike that of television or movies. In selfie practice, those who are watching feel they are also being seen, feel they are building a social network *with* their idols, because everyone is participating in social media. It is what Michel Foucault calls a heterotopic social space, an illusion of equality covering deeply entrenched hierarchy.[28] The hierarchy is financial, as influencers like the Jenners and the Kardashians earn great sums from posts while followers earn nothing for the labor of their participation.

No matter how many Kylie selfies a follower views, the follower will *not* thereby enter Kylie's social sphere or social world. Following is the temporality of abjection. Jenner deploys an eerie admixture of *I'm just like you* selfies as advertising to sell cosmetics. She typically uses herself as the model for the goods, and her followers post glowing endorsements indicating that they feel she is their sister, their mother, a family member. Posting in February 2020 to celebrate her toddler daughter's birthday, Jenner received comments that indicate she is seen by followers as family. She was hailed as "mom" and begged by several commenters to adopt them as her children. There is an oddness to this request given that Jenner herself at age 22 is no more than a decade older than many of her fans. But the familial structure of Instagram carries with it a false and powerful sense that those who participate are mutually endeared to each other.

Friendship and the Faux-Gift Economy

It is this eerie familiality of social media marketing that makes influencers' selfies the new way to sell products. If I go to a department store to buy Lancôme lipstick, I have a clear understanding that I am buying lipstick from a corporation. Kylie Jenner by

contrast sells her lipstick as if she were your best friend telling you, "This lipstick is awesome!" Social media enables her to present items for sale—for profit and not given free out of friendship—as if they were part of a friendship exchange. Here is the mechanism of social media writ large: capitalist transactions masked as friendship *gift* transactions.

The seamless merging of what appears to be friendship with selling merchandise takes the core premise of capitalism—that one only earns a profit by selling goods for more than they are worth—and hides it behind the appearance of friend-based sharing, a gift economy. What is sold is illusion; as Karl Marx renders it, capitalism has to *make the table dance*, that is, create illusions. But in social media there is *no* table: it's all dance, or illusion of friendship as mechanism of selling.[29] Social media is the dance without the table. Using "Kylie Jenner" as exemplary of though hardly alone in this approach, I want to press on the way that the selfie delivers its fusion of friendship's appearance and capitalism's inextricable inherence. The signifier of friendship she offers is images of her face, body, and the houses she owns or social spaces she can command, along with her child, all photographed and filtered in an astonishingly large number of selfies. The merging of the face with the filter immerse her snapshots of self in capitalist products: apps, the phonecam. It would be incorrect to say such selfies are authentic gifts of friendship. And yet so proffered the selfies on Jenner's Instagram pages appear as sincere offerings of self, offered along the same lines as any other teenage or early-twenties woman sharing selfies. The images merge into the faux-familial process that is social media.

Passing On Time

Social media moguls are selling a skewed temporal episteme, one in which the need to confront mortal time, embodied identity, is elided, so their urge to preserve the look of youth is paramount. For the Kardashian-Jenner Instagram family, children are deployed as objects to display, to more deeply articulate the maternal nature of the selfie taker, and also to indicate the continuation of youth.[30] The mode of gaining public attention is through deploying the feminine body as a source of youth by denoting young children as intrinsic to that femininity, indicative of continuing youth and fecundity.

The emersion into visibility by using children as objects of consumption is a key to the Kardashian-Jenner family appeal on Instagram. The feint by which followers feel they are becoming part of the family (because they see family snapshots circulated online), allows the Kardashian-Jenner sisters to accrue wealth significantly beyond that to which they were born. Moving the images of bodies through social media spaces appears to break down boundaries that hold in place capitalist structures. And yet viewers of Kardashian-Jenner wealth and fecundity on display *add to* the sisters' wealth rather than *enter* it, add to it firstly by the sheer numbers of followers that advertisers deem valuable and pay heavily for and also add to the sisters' fortunes by buying their cosmetic and clothing products. The breaking down of capitalist boundaries, then, does not happen through social media but on the contrary, the illusion of breaking down these boundaries further congeals the already strict declensions of capitalist rank.[31]

Social media platforms seem to bring egalitarian remedy to capitalist partitioning of social space by allowing people to post and circulate their own images. And yet what social media platforms actually do is bring the experience of capitalist controlled

social space deeper into the lives of its users.[32] The platforms numb users to the profound impact of economically based spatial and social separations, suppressing the motivated reasons to reject capitalist partitioning of social space. The visual world of selfie practice is that of representation of capitalist-controlled space, feeding those images into yet another capitalist mechanism, the social media platform—which allows everyone to look at but not enter the homes of the wealthy. Notably, when Jenner's social media page began carrying selfies and comments about her loneliness during social distancing early in the pandemic, a few sharp commenters complained that her extraordinarily expensive domicile—shown in her selfies—made for a very different experience of social distancing from theirs.[33] It was as if users suddenly realized that no matter how many times you look at selfies by Jenner's pool, you can't swim in it.

Heterotopia

The transportation of bodies-as-images through social media creates a kind of heterotopic space that is perpetually liminal.[34] Selfie practice has allowed the Kardashian-Jenner sisters to gain wealth because selfie practice fosters the illusion of moving through time with those whom one follows. It fosters a false sense of continuous temporal connection. If I sign on to follow Kylie Jenner's Instagram, I can look at her selfies whenever I like. But she is not temporally sharing *my* life. Selfie practice creates the illusion that the follower is sharing time, *moving through time*, with the wealthy person she is following. That is part of what I mean when I argue that social media selfie practice sells the numbing of the affect of time.[35]

The weight of this heterotopic intertwined social space depends on its ability to bend the epistemic weft of time. Social media fosters the feeling that one's time is intertwined with the time of other users. The merging and braiding of time lines create an illusion of shared space-time. This comforting illusion, of effortlessly merging time epistemes, as opposed to the sense of our mutual dispersion in time, is what social media sells. As Shoshana Zuboff argues, social media practices, along with other surveillance technologies, stem from but also accentuate capitalism.[36] Social media sells the idea of endless selling and endless buying, yes, but paramount is that social media sells the fraudulent feeling that those whom you idolize *share time* with you. Jenner earns around $1 million per selfie post, deploying her selfie posts as marketing moments. What is for sale, here, is not her body as such but her life partitioned into marketable moments. She is selling herself as time.

Film Stills

Kylie Jenner's creation of images is exemplary of social media use in the sense that on her face and body she deploys not only cosmetics and filtering and editing apps, but also cosmetic procedures to create a face and body almost unrecognizable as the facial structure and body build she appears to have inherited—if one reads across her photographs beginning before Instagram. Her identity as such, displayed through social media, is a product of capitalism and then is marketed through capitalism.

The question of whether prosthetics are authentic and agentic is open. Self-adornment is as deep as humanity, a profoundly and uniquely human act.[37] Is there, really, any difference between tattooing one's face and getting Juvéderm injected into one's face? Between dying one's hair and getting butt implants? One could say, yes,

there is the boundary of skin—tattooing, hair dye, and makeup all sit on the surface of the body, whereas injections or implants go beneath the skin. But are they therefore less authentic and agentic forms of self-fashioning? My concern regards not authenticity but temporality. Marks laid across the body are marks in time. If makeup and hair dye could make one appear younger, how nice that would be. Instead, foundation smeared across wrinkles accentuates the wrinkles; hair dye looks fake no matter how expertly applied because it cannot attain natural hair colors' variegation. What *does* alter time's appearance on the body is cosmetic procedures, beneath the skin. It is in laying not as exterior mark but as elided act (the act of injecting fillers, the act of inserting implants, beneath the skin) the subject's bodily response to time that the selfie's eerie temporal episteme is matched. Because the time of the selfie thrives on digitized photography's plastic glissade, uncaught on the hitches of mortal temporality.

Time is a punitive domain for traditional femininity. Social media selfies inherit this pain. The fact that Jenner's facial expression—the expression in her eyes in particular—in many of her Instagram posts is exactly that of Cindy Sherman in the *Film Stills* only brings this point home, both imitating a mash-up of the filmic idea of the alluring woman.[38] This sense of a pulsing vacuity, on which Sherman comments in her *Film Stills* series, Jenner makes for real—for Instagram real, that is. Cindy Sherman may have intended her *Film Stills* as an ironic critique. But social media has taken up her idea of mashing together nebulae of feminine clichés and made it dead serious: the repetitive imitation of ideas of glamour, fame, wealth, or art is the province of social media selfie practice.

For example, consider that—like the *Film Stills*—Jenner's selfies are remarkably similar to each other but no two are identical. Her followers, then, can expect to be soothed by easily recognizable tropes, the baby daughter held on the hip, the sexy pose. This incessant propitiation of the affect of time (everything is unchanging even as it is new today, in selfie-world) is deeply amorphous in selfie practice, because only the similarity-difference pattern of repeating almost the same but not quite the same image keeps social media feeds palatable circling as capitalist mechanism, one in which desire and the repetition of desire never cease.

Jenner is powerful in having her own wealth.[39] The legions of young women photographing themselves and posting on Instagram in following her lead are trying to find a niche in the new economy.[40] And yet, it is unclear if this path forges independence from male dominance. Jenner has mastered the new economy in which what is sold through selfie practice is the image of the self-as-product. Yes, she sells a cosmetics line and stumps as an influencer for other products. But what she sells at the core is the idea of herself, as incessant consumer, swallowing time.

Amazon Prime

Social media is not conspicuous consumption but rather incessant consumption, without closure, without a moment when one might not be thinking about buying. Mimicking the success of Jenner and other influencers, Amazon Prime Student Campus Managers and Prime Student Brand Ambassadors are hired by Amazon to sell not so much products as the idea to other students of their own happiness in constantly buying new products. They sell the appearance of the joy of being a constant consumer and are aggressively recruited by Amazon to do this work that is not perceived as work: being on social media and using the image of the self as a fulcrum

of advertising is touted as part of the fun of being young.[41] Closure, a sense of things coming to an end, is inimical to the numbing of the affect of time that is sold via social media. But it is essential to an artwork.[42] The vast majority of posters earn nothing with their posts, but the selfie-self is being sold *by* social media companies.[43]

The paradox of Jenner and Kardashian's accrual of wealth—which in a capitalist society confers social power—and the overwhelmingly strict adherence to traditional femininity of their selfie images illuminates a paradox of selfie practice.[44] Within the microgesture of taking one's own picture, one can briefly experience a feeling of being in control, but in the context of social media one is a data product for sale.[45] That the Kardashian-Jenner sisters present on social media as supremely polished products for sale, and that they are brilliantly able to produce just those images that their followers seem to want, has gained them wealth by deploying Laura Mulvey's "to-be-looked-at-ness" to full effect.[46] And as such they are retreating entirely from Mulvey's stated goal in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" of dismantling patriarchal sexism as a way of seeing.[47]

Bureaucratic Celebrity

As discussed in chapter three, the bureaucratic regimen of time has few openings for radical difference from capitalist temporality. Facebook and Instagram mirror this pattern of discipline, allowing the citizen population to replay its connection with inflexible structures of bureaucracy through the mirror image of bureaucracy that is social media selfie practice. Just as standing in line in the airport I cannot throw a fit or run away if I want to fly, so also on Facebook, or Instagram, if I—as a woman who looks like a woman—want to be seen, want my posts to get liked, recirculated, and rise to the top of others' feeds, then I cannot rebel against the already established expectations of the social media platform algorithm.[48] If I want to be visible in social media selfie world, I will conform. This is why even identities of radical difference—coming from gifted trans artists and influencers such as Martine Gutierrez, Nikita Dragun, and Juliana Huxtable—offer images that aesthetically align with pictures of Kim Kardashian West, Kendall Jenner, and Kylie Jenner, of slender-waisted, doe-eyed femininity. I do not critique the artists Gutierrez, Dragun, and Huxtable for deploying their beauty, just point out that radical visual difference in Instagram is structurally impossible.[49] We all come to look like Kim.

The paradox of Kardashian-Jenner feminism is that they market themselves as not only purveyors but also containers of what femmes are supposed to be and do: look pretty no matter how it hurts to achieve that look (a dress so tight the wearer cannot sit down while wearing it) and present oneself as physically passive, profoundly constricted by tight clothing, long nails, heavy makeup, exogenous substances deposited under the skin.[50] In the aftermath of Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*, the idea that gender is performative suffuses Western ideas of gender not only in academia but also in the general population. It is a toxic outcome of Butler's well-intended works of feminist theory in the 1990s.[51]

The Kardashian-Jenner sisters present an unhappy fruition of Butler's thesis that gender is "a copy without an original."[52] The Kardashian-Jenner sisters' success lays bare the essential flaw in Butler's theory of the performative. For, rather than grappling with the social reality of being an oppressed class that is faced by most if not all people who are born XX, enter female puberty, and at times give birth to

children—although of course there is *no* fixed meaning to these conditions—Butler's work foments a widespread sense that gender is entirely construct.[53] On the one hand, the substance of her core thesis, that there is *no* continuous coherence between and across cultural apparatuses of gender, is clearly correct. On the other hand, Butler's influential thesis of radical performativity is incomplete and, in its incompleteness, unwittingly anti-feminist.[54] Yes, the oppressive caste structure against the feminine is by no means intrinsic to being born with XX chromosomes, and yet appearing female will often have a deep impact on the lives of those so embodied, regardless of how they fashion themselves.

I came of age in the era in which Butler's thesis of gender became dogma, and, as a college athlete (middle-distance runner), I remember thinking that she wrote about gender and embodiment from the perspective of a person who had never run competitively. Part of the experience as a young female elite runner is that of learning that after puberty you cannot outrun elite male runners.[55] No matter how hard you train, your body is not going to do what cisgender male bodies do on the track; you might be very fast, and an extraordinary athlete by any measure, but you will not equal the speeds of the fastest male runners, those who are as talented and train as hard as you do.[56] It's a paradox: by being an athlete, a traditionally masculine realm, you bump up against just how female you are. I hated it, after puberty being no longer the fastest runner in my peer group, but only the fastest female runner.

But transitioning to become a female-to-male (FTM) man would not have improved my running times enough to make me competitive with the best trained cisgender male runners. (It would also have meant that, as someone taking testosterone, I would not have been allowed to compete against cisgender women runners.)[57] As someone neither particularly attached to being feminine nor masculine, I offer this personal insight to make clear that when I say Butlerian feminist theory makes it hard for feminists to begin with the fact of female embodiment as a site of oppression and as such a cornerstone—though obviously not the whole—of substantive feminist change, I am by no means touting a traditional concept of femininity as some essence of being *femme*. Rather, as I have argued earlier, ideologies of seeing encase those born with feminine looks (predominantly, though not exclusively, here I mean those born XX) within oppressive scopic regimes regardless of how the person so born behaves or resists oppression.

Unmoored from ontologies of embodied mortal temporality, from the basis of the theory of gender as entirely performative, the phenomenon of the Kardashian-Jenner sisters' constrictive hyperfemininity emerges. The sisters take the idea of gender as performative and carry it back to Victorian-era representations of woman as corseted, cosseted, multiparous, concerned only with appearing alluring and with producing children.[58] The sharp turn to the past, that the Kardashian-Jenner sisters perform, *emerges seamlessly from*—and not in any way against—Butler's theory of gender. Butler's influential insights in *Gender Trouble* are precisely the prescription that the Kardashian-Jenner sisters have followed to earn millions of dollars through performative selfie practice. The masquerade of the feminine, translated as social media success.

And yet the temporal space of selfie practice by people gendered feminine is foreshortened by the terms of hyperfemininity that social media practice imposes. The loss of nubile beauty is the specter that presses the game forward, because the only "value" the selfies of influencers like the Kardashian-Jenner sisters tout is the value of looking sexy, and of producing progeny. Their selfies, and the large numbers of

selfie practitioners who copy them, showcase young women. Theirs is a time-sensitive subjectivity.

The affect of time, then, is harshly marked in its gendering of selfie practice. The Kardashian-Jenner sisters offer the fabular look of something that no human being really looks like. This image-work may not be a path for women to gain equitable access to social power, equal pay, equal social respect, and access to self-agency. Social media platforms sell manipulation of the affect of time, and this selling takes place disproportionately via images of feminine people. Women, cisgender and trans, are not only encouraged but forced to move toward extreme performative femininity, in the context of social media selfie practice. *Forced* in the sense that selfies performing hyperfemininity are shared and liked at a high rate, rendering other performative styles effectively invisible in the context of number-driven social media.[59] Algorithmic seeing drives selfie practice, and algorithmic seeing replicates the bias of male dominance because coders are—statistically—overwhelmingly cisgender males.[60] Unless a person born female decides to become a trans man, reasonable for people born female who identify as masculine but not a solution for people born female who simply don't want to go through life trying to look like a plastic cyborg, the landscape of social media offers a tightening of the noose of ultrafemininity, and a move away from feminist progress toward substantive equality. As Renee Engeln unpacks in her theory of "beauty sickness," the effort to appear beautiful does not lead to lasting social power.[61]

Yes, Jenner with a panoply of cosmetics creating a look of sexual allure rakes in billions of dollars. And in capitalism, money is power. So, yes, she has achieved social power—great personal financial wealth—via deployment of hyperfemininity. But her fans and followers are not becoming wealthy, and they are building lives based on the belief that being sexually alluring is an expedient path to social equality or agency. This obsessive performance of the feminine becomes a method of time-affect control in selfie practice.[62]

Selfie practice, in this conceit, is geared toward the effort to never look older than 29. Women over 30 post fewer selfies than men over 30, whereas before that threshold the reverse holds. The realm of the selfie is the realm of nubility. Not one's own endless nubility but rather "the" endless nubility of images that can be posted by women who are younger than 30 (and, depressingly, as young as 11). The affect of time hangs heavy on women in selfie practice. It becomes their responsibility to look endlessly young or to disappear. Theorist Kendra Albert persuasively argues that people outside traditional gender performances, who appear neither traditionally feminine nor masculine, can leverage power and visibility by mining what she calls the "silences" of social media.[63] And yet, even as Albert's work illuminates a necessary path toward social equality in the new economy of images, it begins with the acknowledgment that the algorithms by which social media bypasses, renders invisible, and silences those outside dominant racial and gender groups are constrictive and all-encompassing.

Selfies to the Death

The "queen of selfies" (so dubbed by the *New York Times*), Kim Kardashian West vowed at the 2016 Webby Awards, "Nude selfies 'til I die," indicating the need to keep up with her selfie-self. Kardashian's flippant invocation of mortality shows just how far from confrontation with mortal time is selfie practice. The selfie-self is the

house where digital natives live but it's not like a house that you can build and then it is built; it's not a book you can write and then it's written. Selfie practice is more like a visual prayer that has to be repeated very, very frequently so the gods of social media will keep seeing you. This immanent thread and threat of invisibility conscripts the sociality of social media. It is not that one becomes reflexively self-aware of being more visible through selfie practice as rather that one becomes constitutively aware of an always half-perceived threat of becoming invisible.

Gothic Selfie

Riding selfie practice's ever-present threat of invisibility, the queens of selfies, the Kardashian-Jenner sisters, carry with them a Gothic sensibility. Like the Addams family, the Kardashians are wealthy but their wealth comes from nothing other than appearing wealthy in selfies. The sisters have grown exponentially more wealthy by *being seen as wealthy*; a kind of magic trick perhaps set in motion by Kris Jenner's stony ability to manipulate a leaked sex tape of her child into fame for the entire family.[64]

Selfie practice is Gothic. It accepts at its core an existentialist premise explored to comic effect in the book *My Beautiful Despair* that blends Kim Kardashian's inane comments about beauty with philosopher Søren Kierkegaard's origination of existentialist philosophy.[65] "Matte makeup reminds a person of what he truly is—nothing," says Kierkegaardashian. The book is funny not because it merges two antithetical natures—Kim and Søren—but on the contrary because selfie practice and Kim as queen of it are always already anchored in an elided valley of despair, an understanding of the nothingness that is.

The valley of despair is the place where nothing matters, where you might as well cover yourself with makeup and become an image only. The valley of despair is a fulfillment of capitalist time. Capitalist time is existentialist time, without structure other than a belief that only the surface exists. Selfie practice is not about self-love but a kind of self-emptying in an assumed void. You assume there is nothing but the surface, nothing but image, and embrace that. The lack of deep reciprocity that undergirds selfie practice is masked by mutual practices of followers, likes, shares. But knee-jerk responses don't cover the lack of substantive reciprocity, the kind that involves helping someone else, facing them in real time, reaching out to pick them up bodily when they've fallen, feeding them actual food, and dressing them in actual clothes when they are cold.

Trophy Self

Consider artist Maurizio Cattelan's *Trophy Wife* of Kendall Jenner, created for the Spring 2020 cover of *Garage* (figure 7.7). This sculpture and photographic image hovers between being an exemplar of the selfie and launching a critique of the selfie. The magazine layout itself suggests this ambiguity of the image is a selfie, with the names of Cattelan and Jenner set side by side beneath the wax bust of Kendall, implying that both are the creators of the work. It is, though, an imitation selfie, because Jenner is not the photographer (Campbell Addy is). But it mimics her ubiquitous selfie practice. The suggestion of the wax bust in a photographic image further blurs the image's genre.[66] Is it selfie? Satire? The image is framed in a reference to

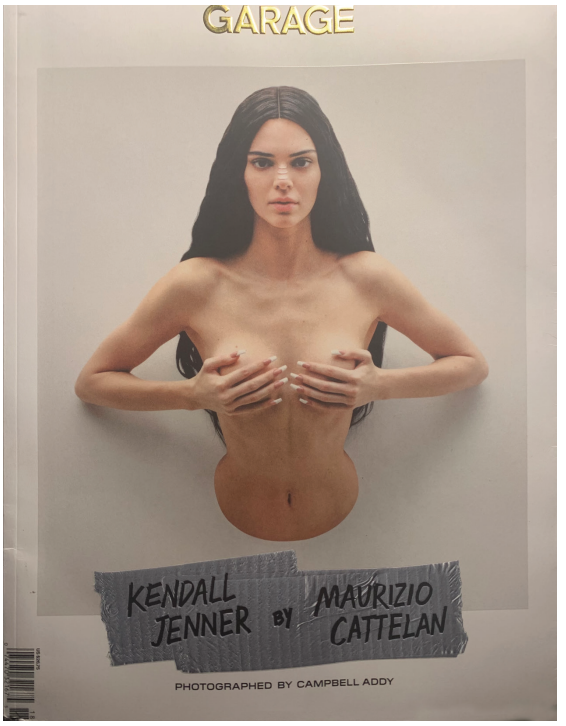

Figure 7.7 *Garage Magazine issue 18,* Spring/Summer 2020, *Kendall Jenner* by artist Maurizio Cattelan. Cover image photographed by Campbell Addy.

Jenner's selfie practice, and the waxen bust, in Cattelan's image, invokes Jenner's liberal use of photo-editing apps that make her appear like a doll, as well as her penchant for décolletage-baring selfies.

The frame of reference for Cattelan's work, then, is selfie practice, even as the image itself is not a selfie. This shift, outside social media, grants his work aesthetic force that an actual selfie cannot sustain. The frame of this work disdains the selfie's unary presentation. The disciplinary frame of the social media selfie image, here, has been punctured, burst through, by the bust. Cattelan's trophy is not intended for immediate consumption on social media even as it clearly references social media. Rather it leverages an ambiguous commentary on selfie practice.

Cattelan's work levies questions about selfie practice, rather than extolling it. Are Kendall's selfies trophies? Are they waxworks? The implicit violence of the Cattelan image, with the suggestion that the woman (Kendall) is half-alive and half-dead—as the deer-head trophy it references is, obviously, culled from a dead deer—speaks to the aggressive visual pace of selfie culture. The aggression of selfie culture, in its relentless emphasis on the presentation of the self to others, forces the image of the self through the wall of the other's gaze.

Cattelan's Kendall-as-trophy also remarks on just this broach, as if Jenner's body were rammed through a wall so violently that she is wedged within it. She appears to be made of wax rather than of flesh; hence, no blood or wound from the violence. In

the waxworks of social media platforms there is no room for introspection, no place for the self to be, as Lucas Samaras eloquently puts it, an "uncultivated field," a field for photo-transformations.[67] The selfie-self is a trophy self. In the pressure of selfie practice the self must assiduously be cultivated. The self as a trophy, in this image, could of course refer to the idea of Kendall's role as an image that other young women aspire to imitate, even as her image is always modulated through cosmetic procedures, photo-editing apps, and makeup. But this trophy self is also a broader commentary on selfie practice as the practice of creating a self that is offered, violently through repetition's force, as a prize, a taxidermic self frozen in the way of an animal that has been captured and stuffed. Cattelan's *Garage* cover reveals selfie practice as enclosed in a frame that is like hunting, violent capture.

As Adorno said of the Enlightenment, "it is the disenchantment of world," so selfie practice is the disenchantment of identity.[68] The haunted self, the self haunted by the gaze of the other, can emerge in and from the self-portrait. Instead of a haunted presence, in selfie practice the gaze of the other is hyperextended and hyperarticulated, this full-frontal presentation of the gaze of the other turns the image of the self into, exactly as Cattelan's *Trophy Wife* image of Jenner implies, a trophy self, a waxworks prize that gets the most likes or shares. The haunted self of the photographic self-portrait by contrast is, as Avery Gordon argues, defined by traces.[69]

These traces or ghosts can perform as haunting presences in self-portraiture, whereas in selfie practice we are not seeing ourselves through the haunting presence of others but through the algorithmic, violent pressure of the immediate expectation of the appeasing look of the other. The violence of the look of the other that has not been remembered or understood but quantified commands selfie practice. By contrast, the violence of the gaze of the other that is contested and mourned is the paratext of some photographic self-portraits. The elided violence of selfie practice is part of Cattelan's point in the trophy of Jenner. It is the elision of the present haunting of the other's gaze that makes selfie practice a form of violence. The glib presentation of the look of the other in social media selfie practice as a benign and desirable force is the paradoxical curve of violence implicit in the circulation of selfies, in social media. Here, the temporality of the self is given to the algorithm. Rather than a gesture of narcissism, selfie is a form of self-negation through its skewed temporality. The negation is symbolic, of course, but as symbol violence has force.

Soft Violence in Social Media

For Pierre Bourdieu, soft violence has hard consequences. Yet it is power enacted without overt violence.[70] Soft violence is an expression of structural social power that enables those in dominant groups to maintain dominance without being overtly physically and verbally vicious to the oppressed. The concept, as Bourdieu extends it, has deep roots in the mid 20th-century work of Frantz Fanon, for it is Fanon who recognizes that colonialist power operates by drawing symbolically from a deep history of physical material violence—war, rape, beating, murder, absolute physical violation of the dominated group—in a process that mystifies and covers over that violence, insidiously making it appear that the dominant group is rational, calm, and in a position to bestow largesse on the benighted colonized.[71] Of symbolic violence we note that its contours emerge in, say, the assumption of a wealthy, white man that he has the right to deference from women, working-class whites, and nonwhite men and

women; and that if such deference is not shown, his anger is experienced as *justified* by the wealthy white man. Soft violence is the social structure that allows a wealthy white man to expect women, nonwhites, and the poor to cede to his wishes. He assumes that such implicit power is "soft" violence because his social power is supported by social structures within which deeply embedded violations of the dominated compose a social imaginary permitting wealthy, white men to inflict suffering on others without those acts being considered violence.

Inasmuch as social media skews the temporality and spatiality of interactions, it might seem to offer a chance for women and other oppressed groups to avoid symbolic violence, avoid that moment of direct interaction when a wealthy, white man assumes he has a right to dominance. But selfie practice seems largely to hew in the opposite direction, and this emerges from its temporal patterns, its injunction to numb time, the core experience it sells as the numbing of time. It extends from selfie's core temporality as that of the algorithm. Even as trans women activists Dragun, Huxtable, and Gutierrez use Instagram selfie practice to claim their feminine identities, the photographic images they produce do not rebuke masculinist structures of power. The pressure of social media platform viewership militates against a radical imaginary, a radical restructuring of society.[72] It is not the content of social media but the frame that makes radicality impossible. Social media is the bureaucracy of the photographic.

Yes, in posting a selfie I can decide what to show of myself, in a stop-and-go temporality that permits me in a shallow way to check how I am seen. But this staccato temporality, the unavoidable bureaucratic oversight that *is* social media, prevents deep change of social patterns of seeing. This is the essence of the selfie. In that very gesture, I lose my ontological ground of looking at myself as myself looking.

In selfie practice we do not scour ourselves with self-confrontation but lacquer ourselves with makeup, photo-editing apps, and cosmetic procedures to produce images that move away from us rather than confront us. What is left behind by selfie practice? A pulse, a signal, intended not to be saved, but intended as soft elision of the nonrecuperability of our existence within temporality. With the poignancy of young social media practitioners' belief in the stability of digitized data, there is an undercurrent of the sacrificial to selfie practice, a sense of throwing away the self into digitization in response to larger social worlds where the stability of meaning has been hollowed out.

No *There* There

The parameters of selfie allow for slippage at the boundaries of defining "self." Instagram's Lil Miquela exemplifies the possibility. This computer-generated identity epitomizes the idea of "there is no there there," coined by Gertrude Stein in *Everybody's Autobiography*.[73] A digital project of the company Brud, Lil Miquela represents no embodied person of any kind, even as the constructed Instagram persona is an image of a girl's face.[74] The computer-generated construct is acknowledged by its creators to be fake but many followers may not know this. Likewise, Amalia Ulman performs in *Excellences and Perfections* a fake self based on images of her real body.

The self as infinitely malleable and editable emerges into extreme fakes—Lil Miquela, Shudu, and as popular media and Ulman's pop art work *Excellences and*

Perfections—from the basis of everyday quotidian selfie practice. The idea of fraudulence gets eroded here because the creators of Lil Miquela and Shudu, selfie personae who do not exist in an embodied way, and Ulman—whose work ironizes fraudulence—make the obvious point that social media users edit their images to present a perfected self that denies, distorts, and even nullifies the possibilities of the unedited self.

Ulman's performance work, *Excellences and Perfections*, teases the edge of this question, touting the perfect social media self as entirely fabricated. The New Museum description of Ulman's performance and photographic work calls it a " 'boycott' of her own online persona."[75] By constructing the *Excellences and Perfections* fake self, she boycotts the material self. Or, alternately interpreted, she boycotts the fakeness and falseness of social media as such. Though one could ask why use social media if you want to protest social media, the fact that critics have interpreted Ulman's work—which emerged from her experience with a life-threatening bus crash—as a self fabricated to suit media stereotypes indicates the edginess of the work. The recirculation of these surface tropes capitalizes on capitalism, and in that capitalism is the world order; how do we step outside and critique this totalizing system?[76]

Having interpreted the self as a construct of tropes and a copycat, Ulman arrives at a culture, the selfie culture, that can only ever produce such a replicated self, in a temporality that cannot disengage itself from capitalist temporality because social media is the only platform for the selfie-self. Outside of social media, a phonecam is just a camera. Selfie tropes circulate a self rigidly defined by what is always already recognizable. It is the fruition of Adorno's theory of mass culture as the never-new. Ulman sees Instagram as the ultimate false field. Ulman's trajectory importantly stems from embodied trauma: she describes the Greyhound bus accident as horrific, in graphic detail, stating that after the crash, in which she was knocked unconscious, she "woke up with my bones sticking out of my legs."[77] This intensely experienced vulnerability of embodiment spurs her to create a flat, vacuous social media self through mimicking fake surgeries (after her experience of multiple instances of real surgery), at once achieving and critiquing the vacuously capitalist goal of creating female sexual desirability through photo apps. In responding to the terror of mortal time, mortal embodiment, Ulman exposes selfie practice's parallel structure. Parallel to self-confrontation, parallel to the haunting structure of the temporal episteme outside capitalism, selfie, which cannot intersect with self-portraiture, is the vanguard of celebrity.

Notes

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31 Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2014).
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8 Self-Portrait Performance

Roland Barthes's *Camera Lucida* is an elliptical autobiography, narrating his grief over his mother's death through encounter with the eidetic register, specifically, through photographs.[1] In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes limns autobiography by making himself the *exemplar* of response to the photographic image.[2] Often—and rightly—interpreted as a nod to phenomenological ontology, his process is also in the paradigm of autobiography and of self-portrait.[3] *Camera Lucida* steers away from linear narrative. Barthes confronts and finds himself through gazing at photographs. The writing is autobiographical not merely because it details his mourning for his mother but because it is centered in the perceptions of the self as the test of the meaning of seeing. For Barthes is seeking the gaze of the lost m/other. The self-portrait, here, encodes the haunted space of the gazes of ghosts. His deceased mother's gaze alone, states Barthes, could see him "at degree zero."[4] The gaze that haunts him is *her* gaze, which alone sees him as he is, rather than as he seems. The time of the self, in the self-portrait, can be the zero hour, a time when the self's confrontation with her mortality is staged.

But the selfie is never at zero: it is never the zero hour in the selfie because each selfie image references the chain of posting and viewing that is social media practice. The selfie is not the confrontation of mortal time but the indulgence of it; as such, it does not stem from Renaissance inauguration of the self-portrait but from capitalist bureaucratic ordering of bodies.[5] The selfie works on the premise that you need never face yourself but instead buy yourself an identity by selling the idea of identity, image by image. The time of the selfie is premature and belated, anticipated and postponed, but never of the exact moment of confrontation. A self-portrait, unlike a selfie that is locked in the rubric of social media, denotes agency, indicating, "I have taken this space and this time to make myself the arbiter of myself."

If photographic self-portrait, in its stringency, may be compared to autobiography then selfie is a roman à clef. Its temporality is without reckoning. Because another selfie will always push away the one before, no selfie stages a place in time of risk, the risk of confronting one's place in time. Ellen Carey's and Lucas Samaras's experimental work with Polaroid self-portraits, discussed in chapters three and seven, manipulate the image. But rather than jettisoning a confrontation with mortal temporality, as in selfie's indulgent time-space (indulgent in the specific sense of indulgence, meaning *buying* social media *salvation*) Carey's and Samaras's Polaroids radically confront the force of time on the self. The blind field of a photograph is its enjambment in temporality, the way that everything else going on at the time the picture was made is at once nullified (unseen) and reified (more real than the picture). A self-portrait's blind

field is encapsulated in the gaze of the self gazing at the self, whereas the blind field of the selfie is AI, machine seeing. This difference plays out in differential temporality.

When Nan Goldin, for example, photographs herself one month after being battered, the question of time is posed with the temporal line of the photograph's title—*Nan* One Month after *Being Battered*—articulating the photograph's containment of elongated time, its durational quality (roman font in title mine). As Jae Emerling makes clear, durationality is not antithetical to photography, but part of its repertoire.[6] Goldin's self-portrait extends and compresses the time of battering, the beginning of healing, articulating her need to face herself across this fragmented plane of her shattered partly healed face and identity. The title of the self-portrait is time: *one month after.*

Ellen Carey's self-portraits (figures 7.1, 7.2, 7.3, 7.4, 7.5, and 7.6) epitomize this temporal difference between the photographic self-portrait and the selfie. Deploying the Polaroid as emblematic technology, Carey merges the human and the camera as machine of printing, instating a place of pain and distance, an acknowledgment of the temporal fold of identity. Selfie, by contrast, cannot show the technology that powers it, that is, the AI that organizes social media. Instead, it persists in a place of elision, unable to reveal precisely the medium of its visibility, the coded apparatus of social media platforms. Carey's work centers on the camera as tool, pulling from it the theme of the self's always lost place in time. Her deeply mournful work, in the closing decades of the 20th century, predicts the unsustainable pace of self-diffraction that typifies social media self-imagining. Her work in the *Stopping Down* series (2001) is augural, admonitory, searching self-portraits for a place where the self might stay. Always fragile but persistent, the images haunt the 21st century with their prescient understanding of how the material form of visibility will be eroded, as we now experience in social media selfie practice.

Eternal Return

Amelia Jones, in her book *Body Art/Performing the Subject* and essay "Eternal Return," the publications of which precede the widespread use of selfies and social media, develops the insightful idea that the self-portrait photograph is "a supplement to the inescapable lack that founds subjectivity" and that the photographic self-portrait is a "technology of embodiment... that paradoxically points to our tenuousness and incoherence as living, embodied subjects."[7] Jones argues that self-portrait photography is framed by absence and lack. I suggest a decisive difference between the possibilities of transformation through encountering identity in self-portrait photography versus in the selfie. The self-portrait can act as something more than a prosthetic propping up of the self, rather as a confrontation with the anxiety of identity, a facing of the loss that constitutes the self. The selfie, ensconced in social media definitively, is always framed by the propping up of social media's contextual connections. In this chapter, I think through self-portraits, selfies, and photographs taken by photographers that are perhaps neither self-portrait nor selfie, uncovering key differences between the selfie and the photographic self-portrait, seeing these differences through the differential relationships of selfie and self-portrait to temporality. My emphasis is on contemporary photographers Shelley Niro (Mohawk, Bay of Quinte), Nan Goldin, Cindy Sherman, Ellen Carey, LaToya Ruby Frazier, Nona Faustine, and Carrie Mae Weems.

I begin with Sherman, whose work is most similar to the selfie, precisely because she is not engaged in creating self-portraits even though she is nearly always the model for her photographic works.

In an Inherited Mirror

Sherman's art is the anteroom to the selfie. Here I do not refer to her 21st-century Instagram images, Gothic twists on the selfie, but instead to her earlier work in the *Untitled Film Stills*. In these pre-selfie works, which are not self-portraits, Sherman does not photograph herself as herself nor does she photograph herself performing as another but instead photographs herself as no one. This *myself-as-none-but-an-image* is the archetype of the selfie. Far from showing us as we look living our lives, the selfie produces the self as no one in particular, but rather a stylized image particularizing a mass emblem. The selfie creates the image of the self as no one. In this fragmentary assemblage inherited tropes of sexism prevail.

Sherman's *Film Stills* series models a similar vacuous pastiche often touted as feminist art; I suggest that this late 1970s series replicates rather than dislocates the male gaze. Consider *Untitled Film Still #56*. Here Sherman is heavily made up, with starkly defined brow pencil and lipstick, her hair starched and blonde. She stares at her doll-like self in the mirror. The elegant image creates a *gloriole* effect, a *trompe l'oeil:* we are seeing from the back of her head to the mirror image of her face, with the white imbrication of camera flash haloing her doll-shaped cheek, suggesting a tondo frame. What is jarring is the blankness of her gaze in that mirror. There is no negotiation of the self confronting the self but rather a hollow-eyed doll checking to see if her look is right. Her gaze repeats the male gaze, checking how close she has come to approximating the look of the doll, here mimicking Marilyn Monroe. None of the *Film Stills* replicate any specific person or scene from a film, and that is just the point. The pleasure of Sherman's portrait is the self-fetishization that Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" is a manifesto against.[8] Precisely Mulvey's argument is that the pleasure of the male gaze is shared by all genders and sexualities even as its expression in camera-produced media constructs and continues the oppression of women. The nape of Sherman's neck is offered expressly to the viewer; we are placed close enough to touch it, and that is the chilling punch of the photograph.

Consider a Kendall Jenner selfie from Instagram, early 2020. Jenner captures herself in a moment eerily similar to that of Sherman's *Film Stills* some 40 years ago: gazing into the mirror at a heavily made-up self, Jenner is nearly unrecognizable. She could be any 20-something brunette on a strict diet. Her eyes are without expression. Just as in Sherman's *Film Stills*, she uses her eyes to check whether she looks alluring. As with Sherman's *Film Stills*, Jenner is absorbed into the mirror. In these images, the mirror stands for the male gaze, and it absorbs the female subject entirely. She looks into it not *for* herself but for what she can make *of* herself in a man's eyes. Here, *man* and *male* do *not* refer to biological sex but to a socialized way of seeing. Just because a woman wields the camera and takes her own image does not mean that photograph is resisting the male gaze.

Film Vernacular

Placing herself between characters never landing on any actual identity but composed of fragments of identity, Sherman frequently occludes her eyes or wipes out her

expression in the *Film Stills* series so that she appears evacuated of thought. In her eyes there is no expression, and that is the consistent trope of the images. If there is an expression, it is that of being lost, being at the end of portraiture's resources.

This emptiness is Sherman's instated distance from the self-portrait. These images are not only never about her, they are also never about anyone. The collaged effect of multiple cultural and media signifiers layered suggest that this vacancy of the self is the effect specifically of the culture industry.[9] Sherman does not reject the culture industry; rather, she aggregates its allure in images that show how multiple culture industry signifiers converge to create the emptiness of the self as formed by the culture industry.

It is not that Sherman resists the culture industry. She uses it. Her work is a deeply pessimistic montage, layering signs borrowed from film and popular advertising. It is not montage as a way of resisting capitalist products and the culture industry—but a gathering of the eye-catching trash of the culture industry.[10] Her images often center on trash, rubbish, and what's discarded or about to be lost. In building "selves" out of the trash of the culture industry, Sherman prefigures the selfie. It is not simply that she photographs herself—Claude Cahun and Francesca Woodman have oeuvres primarily constructed of photographs they took of themselves, but their work is not predictive of the selfie—it is that Sherman stages the self as a space of evacuation, absence, at the end of the road but never ended.

This is precisely the paradigm of the selfie: an image of self constructed from the detritus of commercial mass media that imitates nonspecifically the movies, commercials, celluloid fanzine, and now famous people's social media. The imitation of selfies is precisely that of Sherman's late 1970s and early to mid-1980s work: it pulls from culture industry in nonspecific, nonquoting ways, filling the image with signifiers without particularity. They show that self-expression is what Michel Foucault would call power-dominance as pleasure, power-pleasure, swirls of power and pleasure, and submitting oneself not only to the self-made panopticon of social media but to the gaze of culture industry.[11] Whereas one might counter that Sherman's work is ironic, the force of her images is entirely blank. Irony is sharp, pointed, drawing the viewer in so one is savvy to the critique being made, whereas her work resists any real traction with the viewer. Like the selfie, Sherman's work is blank, smooth, moving past us like night against the window.

I do not suggest that Sherman *created* the selfie movement. She presciently senses the very ways that culture industry creates self-image through amalgams of image purchase that become image trash. And *that* becomes the selfie. The selfie is always on its way to becoming trash, on its way to being a post that looks old; it is redolent of what happened yesterday and, in the time frame of consumer culture, does not matter now (*now* being simply the moment after the selfie). Sherman's *Film Stills* and photographs likewise gather to the prop of the self the products of culture industry, creating the self as culture industry refuse, trash.

What Is Original?

By contrast, recall Shelley Niro's triptych of self-portraits, *Abnormally Aboriginal*, discussed in chapter five of this book. In these digital photographs that are not circulated on social media but are displayed in low resolution and thumbnail form on Niro's website, the artist confronts the haunting gaze of the colonizing other. Here,

the gaze the photograph contests is that of the colonialist settler culture that over centuries of violent abrogation of indigenous American land, and murder of indigenous American people, has created for indigenous Americans a nonconsensual identity with many names. By white settlers, indigenous Americans have been called various names, most of them offensive, none of them created by indigenous people: *Indians*, *Red Skins*, *Red Men*, *Native Americans*, *First Nation Peoples*, and *Aboriginal Americans*, to list a few.[12] For Niro's haunted triptych of self-portraits, the social power that gives whites the ability to name and thereby define—in their gaze—indigenous America is the centerpiece of haunting. The series throws into relief the violent force by which whites enact discursive colonization.[13] As James H. Merrell writes, "Wordplay... [has] real effects for Native peoples and for the course of American history. They were and are tools in the imperial project of relieving [American] Indians of their sovereignty and their land."[14]

Niro's self-portraits contrast the absurdist yet utterly powerful forms of surveillance that such words create. The idea of the "Aboriginal" as "abnormal" is tragically common in the history of American colonization. Niro takes white words and white terms, that is, the idea that DNA defines one's inheritance—as opposed to tradition, knowledge, family, or oral history—and unpacks these forms of discursive colonization. She faces the camera wearing cat's-eye glasses, a supplement or prosthetic for vision (figures 5.1, 5.2, and 5.3).

Niro's T-shirt in this frame reads "Abnormally Aboriginal," and it shows the double helix of a DNA strand, as well the cliché profile of an indigenous American man that looks to have been drawn from the Buffalo nickel (minted from 1913 to 1938 in the United States). The reference to the imprint of the European gaze on indigenous peoples, then, is threefold: the name, the Western idea of DNA as inheritance, and the cliché idea of how an "Indian" looks (vis-à-vis the Buffalo nickel profile). But Niro's own face, by contrast, is not a coin but human and exposed, stripped of makeup and adornment. She is not a cliché but a woman. She gazes at the viewer straight on, neither shy nor angry nor sad. Just confronting the viewer with her realness, the reality of her existence outside of white gazing and white naming. She returns the gaze, staring back at white colonization.

In the next frame, she is wearing dark glasses, angling her gaze away from the viewer. She looks harder, inaccessible. The wording on the T-shirt has changed, now reading "Normal Original." She is normal to herself and to other indigenous Americans—she is not an "other," she is normal. And she is original. Original to this continent, as the indigenous peoples of America were the first peoples to inhabit the land and for millennia the only people to do so.[15] She is original also in the sense of being not a cliché of race and ethnicity but a human unique to herself. The dark shirt and glasses frame a sense of Niro as a somber figure, someone who sartorially associates herself with the goth side of American culture and history. She looks like someone to reckon with, a cool customer, in her shades, her black T-shirt, looking away from the viewer.

In the last frame, the glasses are taken off, there is no paraphernalia worn by Niro except the T-shirt, and all symbols except the DNA helix have been removed from the shirt. She turns her head slightly toward the viewer, but her expression is wary. Without the names, without the cliché profile, there is only the strand of DNA. Here the intent is ambiguous. Is Niro indicating that she is indigenous because of her DNA, that this is the stripped, reified version of her identity? Or is it the opposite: that

defining indigenous peoples by DNA is as much an example of discursive colonization and what Pierre Bourdieu calls symbolic violence as naming practices and cliché images?[16] Or is she indicating that without these addenda, without glasses, without names, without stereotypes, she—as with any human—is materially a set of deoxyribonucleic acid molecules, a code of DNA? Or is the third image a more potent form of haunting, suggesting that even when props are taken away, the ghostly imprint of colonialist violence stays—here that imprint being the idea of identity as a scientific structure as opposed to traditional indigenous ways of inscribing the meaning of self?

The ambiguity of the final frame of the triptych indicates the self-portrait's vulnerability. The photographer here is unprotected by glasses. She faces us as Emmanuel Levinas describes facing, through the wound of shared human vulnerability.[17] Niro does not present a palpable wound, no bruises or scars. Creases between her eyes and at the edges of her mouth suggest determination; these lines suggest resistance to but also encounter with suffering. They suggest encounter with time. Strongly against the mode of selfie practice, Niro's self-portrait photograph does not attempt to smooth or edit signs of aging. This decision indicates a difference between facing the spectral traces of the gaze of the other on the self, the fulcrum of self-portraiture, and asking for a scripted immediate response, the crux of selfie practice. Selfie practice and social media frame the self as always already contending with the living, and therefore look mortuarial. Niro, by contrast, looks as if she could step from the frame and accost you, the viewer. This is the self-portrait as a space of held time, of slowness accruing around the image, allowing contemplation and change, conversing with the ancestors.

The Sacrificial Self

Along these lines of self-portraiture as political act, contemporary African American photographers LaToya Ruby Frazier and Carrie Mae Weems contend—in works separated by more than a decade—with the self-portrait as a staging of sacrificial exchange, or the self-portrait as a second sacrificial self. The two series, Weems's *Kitchen Table Series* (1990) and Frazier's *The Notion of Family* (2001–2014), emphasize domesticity, setting the self in the coded feminine domain of house, bedroom (in Frazier's work), and kitchen (in Weems's work). Yet Frazier's series *The Notion of Family* is presented as starkly sincere and urgently real, photographs as gritty cinema *verité* broaching what Rob Nixon calls the "slow violence" of environmental racism.[18] By contrast, Weems's *Kitchen Table Series* is a creation of the photographer's imagination, portrayed by models, including Weems herself, situated around a kitchen table in poses that Weems plans and stages. It is not her actual family. For this, we would look to Weems's earlier series, *Family Pictures and Stories, 1981–1982*, and yet in that series there are no self-portraits of the photographer. Hence, the point of tension around the self as an actor in a drama of race, gender, environment, and domesticity emerges from a consideration of Weems's *Kitchen Table Series* together with Frazier's *Notion of Family*. Here the confrontation of the self within the containing space of the feminine domestic is staged as a space of sacrifice, survival, and transcendence.

In choosing to place these works in conversation, I emphasize the photographers' identity as African American women emerging from blue-collar, working-class backgrounds. Weems and Frazier are not similar as artists, nor for that matter as human beings, but I compare them to reflect the sociocultural positionality of African

American women from working-class backgrounds in the late 20th- and early 21st-century United States. Weems and Frazier contend with a formative social matrix that forces them toward a performance of the sacrificial en route to transcendence. This performance is enacted through the presentation of the self in self-portrait photographs that force the viewer to contend with and acknowledge the position of adversity, but also of what bell hooks calls the oppositional gaze, self-portrait as an act that suggests a way out of being unjustly socially positioned.[19]

The sacrificial self, as I use the term, does not mean someone who destroys herself. Instead, it signifies the photographic image of the self that is cast as separate from the material conditions that create the image, independent from the material conditions that hold the subject. In this sense, the photographic self-portrait as Weems and Frazier deploy it acts as a confrontation both intrasubject (a visual moment and emblem wherein the self confronts the self) and intersubject, casting the self as an iconic reminder to the viewers of social injustice. The image is proffered to viewers as *something*, almost tangible but always eluding touch, through which viewers access the space of the suffering subject. In this specific exchange, the suffering subject subverts her culturally dictated position as the abject, becoming a supervisory figure who stands in judgment as she gazes at viewers with a critique of their position—of gendered, raced, or economic privilege.

In *The Notion of Family*, text is context: the context of environmental racism and its slow violence. Frazier documents her family's ensconcement in the polluted Pittsburgh borough of Braddock, Pennsylvania, showing physical suffering and illness countercut with scenes of the city's industrial pollution. The way that the environment infiltrates the family home in Frazier's photographs is adumbrated as shadow: the enigma of pollution's invisibility and its visible marks Frazier exposes and contests in photographs that reveal toxic dust smears on the walls of the family home. Among these shadows, within some photographs, she places earlier photographs of her family so that her mother, her step-great-grandfather, gramps, her ancestors, and she herself at times appear as fixed, photographic, forms counterposed to the marks of pollution. Frazier describes her process, not only in this work but in her art as such, as one of layering, not separating portrait photography from landscape photography but instead revealing how the subject emerges from and participates in the setting that produces her.[20]

Her photographic images of family, in *The Notion of Family*, are emblems of the self-formation of the artist. For it is in the self-portraits that *The Notion of Family* generates the transcendent sacrificial figure of the artist herself as a way to subvert and overturn the terms of subjectivity enforced by capitalist racism and its attendant, environmental racism. The self-portraits of the young woman who is LaToya Ruby, at times suffering from lupus, in her bedroom, and juxtaposed in profile with her mother (figures 8.1 and 8.2), are the pulse points of the work, the way that the work mobilizes escape and subversion through image.

The figure of the self's refusal to be destroyed but also refusing to elide her suffering is symbolically sacrificial in the specific sense that the self thus stripped bare, thus offered, is to viewers a double form that oscillates among types of offering. Here, it offers the bare image of the self: the self in the context of birth and birth trauma (so juxtaposed with the mother's face). This allows the viewer entry into the private, intimate places of self, home, domestic space, love between mother and child, and suffering of illness on the promise that the viewer's entry will grant the photographed

Figure 8.1 LaToya Ruby Frazier, *Momme*, 2008, gelatin silver print, 30 × 40 in. Copyright LaToya Ruby Frazier. Courtesy of the artist and the Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels.

Figure 8.2 LaToya Ruby Frazier, *Huxtables, Mom, and Me*, 2008, gelatin silver print, 16 × 20 in. Copyright LaToya Ruby Frazier. Courtesy of the artist and the Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels.

self a release from the very conditions so exposed. And it may also grant the viewer's release from co-suffering with the transcendent artist figure of self-portraiture.

The sacrificial self of the photograph is not a way of self-destruction or self-abnegation but an exchange of the most subtle and brilliant kind; if we accept the self-portrait in *The Notion of Family*, we also exchange the privilege of viewers—the viewers of fine art typically wealthy and well educated, in comparison to the inhabitants of Braddock—as what must be questioned to atone for the suffering of the photographically figured self. It is a risk that Frazier takes, in the symbolic brilliance of her image making. Hence Frazier's visual quotes and references to Ingmar Bergman's *Persona* notify her viewers that we are being pulled into a doubling relationship with the photographer (figure 8.1). We are not simply observing the doubling of mother and child but entering into the contract, doubling ourselves with the photographer through the intensity of her vision.

Frazier would seem to veer close to sincerity in photography, in a haunting portrait of herself naked on her bed. She looks fragile, young. The image is connected, in *The Notion of Family*, to a similar vision of the photographer suffering an attack of lupus, an autoimmune disease that Frazier connects to Braddock's pollution. But here the self-portrait in the nude also acts as allusive template. The naked self in Frazier's self-portrait is also, implicitly, the injured self, the self sickened by chronic exposure to pollution. There is a critique here. The photographer presents herself not only as an emblem of pollution's harm—implying that the pollution itself is to blame for her illness—but also as an emblem of *what is harmed*, deploying herself (her self-portrait self) as a sign of damage. This double presentation of the self as the sacrificed, that which is presented as harmed and also that which condemns the forces that create the body affected by pollution surfaces in the formal turns of Frazier's self-portrait. She confronts us from that last retreat, the bedroom, the place where the child—Frazier presents herself in this early work as still a child at home—is protected. From this last stronghold, the image accuses.

The Notion of Family does not, however, accuse Frazier's mother or family. It accuses the viewer, or, differently put, the photographs evince and are motivated by awareness of the probability of the viewer's relative wealth versus Frazier's family or origin's poverty. The series attacks America's entrenched system of wealth disparity and its profoundly racialized structure, and this attack is particularly launched through the genre of the self-portrait, a way of showing Frazier's vulnerability but also a way of showing the wrongness of that socially enforced vulnerability. We (wealthy Americans) materially benefit from her suffering, because America establishes poverty and racial violence, environmental racism, through violently maintained social and material boundaries between the privileged wealthy and the economically abject. Pollution in Frazier's work is real; chemicals, runoff, and slag emitted by the steelworks in Braddock. But also it is symbolic, marking the economic and social worlds of Frazier's family.[21]

Weems's *Kitchen Table Series* at first glance seems far removed from any representation of suffering. The *Kitchen Table Series* is staged to represent a jazz-inspired version of a woman's life. The kitchen table shown to such effect in the series is procured by Weems for the photographs; it is not her kitchen table. The women, men, and children who appear in the series are models hired by Weems. They are not her family. The story narrated alongside the images is not autobiographical, not the story of Weems's

own life. And yet Weems herself performs the central role in the series. It is she who appears playing cards, feeding her man, teaching the child performing as her daughter to apply makeup, mourning her man's departure, and confronting viewers alone. This decision, to perform in the central role herself, sets *Kitchen Table Series* apart from the arch irony of postmodernism.[22] It suggests that despite the series' blurring of the boundaries among performance art, documentary, and staged portraiture, the artist herself has laid her cards on the table. It is her own face and body that she offers the viewers. The sincerity of embodiment anchors the series.

Hence, in undressing at her putative *Kitchen Table*, in the image titled *Nude*, Weems sheds the social parameters that she carefully stages on the body of her model-muse-self. She leans back in a position suggesting self-stimulation. Her age is apparent: she is a woman in the fullness of life, just as the verbal text of the *Kitchen Table Series* states. The table, here, is empty and no one else is around. The actors and models portraying her lover, children, friends, are gone. The nakedness of the self-portrait is solitary. This solitariness, arguably, is definitive of the self-portrait genre: one stages a confrontation with the camera. But Weems's nude self-portrait in *Kitchen Table Series* is placed in a group of photographs that conspicuously question what kind of truth photography offers. The story of *Kitchen Table* is not the photographer's own life story. The images are scripted, planned. Is her nudity and solitariness, in *Nude*, a shift whereby we viewers are offered the *real* Weems? The encounter with the self, here, would seem to be rather more a staging of the idea of an encounter with the historical, the embodied.

The jazz rhythm that Roy DeCarava evocatively describes as filled with breaks, that is syncopated, elliptical, and returning, Weems deploys in *Kitchen Table* by positing a self-image that is not her self but her body.[23] Unlike Sherman, Weems does not costume herself in ways that obscure her identity. Into and away from time, time as circular, Weems approaches by staging a self anchored in the materiality of the kitchen table. Weems's *Kitchen Table* evokes a donnée, a given space of American culture and history that is not anchored to any one life. Even the time of *Kitchen Table* is somewhat ambiguous, with garment choices leaving open the images' historical epoch. The self in syncopated time is a variation on the theme of this book—the lost-and-found self. It is the fullness of an African American woman's life that Weems portrays, here, and in that sense performs sacrificially, that is, ceding the narrative of her own personal life to reveal the broader narrative of African American womanhood.

In *The Notion of Family* and the *Kitchen Table Series*, the camera functions as interlocutor and coconspirator. The camera is at once intrusive, violating domestic space, making what is private public, and recuperative, shifting the gaze so that the implicit invisibility of the lives of African American women becomes visible.

This visibility rejects the invasive gaze of white surveillance even as it admits space for white spectatorship. The ambivalence of what the camera, the photograph, offers thus is at the core of these self-portraits. By bringing Nona Faustine's 2015 series *White Shoes* into my discussion here, that is, juxtaposing Weems's 1990 work with Frazier's 2001–2014 images and with Faustine's 2015 *avant garde* selfie series, I interrogate where self-portrait and selfie diverge.

Faustine's *White Shoes* emphasizes the artist's nude body in a deftly repeated trope showing her wearing white shoes. Her face, while not obscured in the images, is not

searched or studied. The body functions as *the* figure of the series: a figure of the history of enslavement, oppression. It is staged in front of an antebellum house where slaves were owned in New York; in a graveyard as if on a slave block; on Wall Street to remind viewers that this too once was a slave block; and at the ocean, where slaves ships came into the American Northeast. Always, Faustine wears white shoes. The shoes signify white racism, but also the ability of the artist to literally *step on*, *walk on top of* whiteness. The images have been championed as protests against fat shaming, in readings that focus on Faustine's curves. This seems a limiting way of interpreting the work. The history of racist violence and oppression that Faustine confronts—the slave block, the graveyard that erases the presence of African American labor and lives in U.S. history, and Wall Street itself as a site of injustice—is not entirely due to her curvaceous body type, as African American women of *all* body types were subjugated under enslavement.[24] In *White Shoes*, the presence of the body is emphasized over a study of the face. The body's suffering, its labor, its work of carrying itself, is studied in historical context: history as embodied return through which invisible suffering is revealed.

Mary Douglas's notion in *Purity and Danger* of abjection circulates also in Faustine's *White Shoes*, wherein the artist reprises and overturns scenes of that foundational abjection of the United States, the nation's engagement with the slave trade and its system of enslavement. For Faustine, the staging of the past historical abjection of enslavement is handled by posing the question of abjection's continuance: Are we able to see Faustine's body as intact, contained, *safe from harm*? But enslavement also continues to haunt the visual economy of the United States with the risk that an African American woman, especially one undressed in public spaces, can infect or haunt those spaces with the specter and threat of her sacrificed, revitalized, and even revenant body. Faustine's white shoes, in some ways, function like Weems's kitchen table as quotidian objects that feminize the gut punch of the work: the shoes and the table are markers, holding a stable space of viewership, allowing the artist to create images of self that overturn entrenched white masculinist systems of power in the United States. Weems, Faustine, and Frazier deploy the self-portrait as a form of haunting and maybe taunting, as Abigail Solomon-Godeau suggests.[25] The haunt of self is never complete because Weems, Frazier, and Faustine always present themselves in these self-created images of self as living, *vividly* present. But there is a double consciousness that pulls at the images as well, a sense in which time is fluid and stilled, the syncopated jazz rhythms that Weems makes clear are her inspiration for the series.

Shoes, Table, Family

Faustine's self-images carry a sophistication that belies their grounding in selfie social media. She seeks out historical sites and poses herself in them: Wall Street, the Capitol steps, the former burial ground of the enslaved, and a New York antebellum house turned museum. The shoes, in a kind of homage to Weems's kitchen table, are everyday objects that through repetition in the series of images gain meaning. White shoes: cleanliness, femininity, church shoes, and the oppressive force of whiteness. Faustine is not so much saying "consider my curvy body beautiful," as "*consider me present in embodied history*." Consider the ways that history erased and continues to

erase Black female presence. The idea, then, that this series is all about Faustine is as far off base as would be a reading of *Kitchen Table Series* as a confession of Weems's personal history. Instead, when Weems creates her earlier series, *Family Pictures and Stories*, she herself is not pictured. She emerges as a subject of self-portraiture only when she uses photography to engage history and culture as staged, differential, problematic, and untrustworthy but also necessary for the encounter of the self-portrait as cultural subject. Weems, Faustine, and Frazier contest the linearity of colonialist time, inserting self-images that riddle the truisms of progress with confrontations that disrupt the traditional story of Western time. Faustine evokes moments in the history of enslavement in America in jarring self-portraits that establish the unendingness of these moments in time—not simply their contemporary relevance but their lack of ending, their continuance because America has never reckoned with this history—while Frazier situates her images of self in the grievous eternity of industrial pollution. Eternity, here, is not as Amelia Jones imagines it, a return, but a never leaving of the disavowed real.[26] The time of the self, in Frazier's self-portraits in *The Notion of Family*, is the cauterized time of the wound, of bodily vulnerability in environmental racism, but also paradoxically the unending time of pollution, the continuation and continuance of polluted spaces, inhabited by the economically vulnerable, in industrial capitalism.

Capitalist time itself is contested in Faustine's, Weems's, and Frazier's self-portraits; here the self as locus and pivot of time, the place where spaces of possibility and mobility manifest through the self-image. In the photographic self-portrait, the self as emblem of exposure—exposing the history of enslavement, environmental racism, and the falseness of white feminism—transmutes into a contestation of capitalist time. It is also a protest of colonialist time. In and out of time, the self-image, in Frazier, Weems, and Faustine, is posited as protest, as mark, holding in the flow of time still, standing in it, sacrificial and revolutionary.

Faustine, Weems, and Frazier anchor their self-images not in the performative (though of course all art is performative) but in the dialogic, invoking and calling on viewers to engage. This political act draws on an interactive definition of self. Here, the exposure of face and body in photograph poses a reckoning. Dialogic self-theory posits a transition from the traditional self to the modern self to the postmodern self; although these categories already seem outmoded, their application to the photographs of Faustine, Weems, and Frazier, albeit with some revision, is worthwhile.[27]

The traditional self is defined by adhering to responsibilities, and yet one may define such a self more fluidly than simply traditional gender and religious roles. Faustine invokes history clearly by placing herself contesting the horror of the enslaved person on the sales block. In a fugue-like take on the dialogic traditional self, Faustine empties the tradition, showing its rigid hollowness, but she also seriously engages it, evoking sympathy and empathetic connection with African American women caught in traditional inherited roles of suppression and oppression.

Likewise, Frazier plays the traditional role of the daughter: keeping the vestal hearth, so to speak, her photographs create family by gathering it, image by image. And Weems's *Kitchen Table* twists and opens the role of woman as keeper of the hearth: the kitchen table. The self-portraits engage and contest the traditional feminine self. Likewise, the self posited as following a singular destiny is contested in the release of the self from oppressive social structures that these self-portraits perform.

The modernist notion of self is static, lasting across time, whereas Weems, Frazier, and Faustine suggest selves always re-envisioning their own social contours.

In Weems's *Kitchen Table* series, the self is lost and found through a sacrificial turn by which the artist subsumes the definition of her personal identity into a story line that shoulders African American female identity in America as virtuosic, self-controlled, and also mysterious, impossible to entirely plumb. The gesture of hiding the self Weems produces by photographing herself as exemplary of the African American female gaze but not revealing details of her actual biography. She subsumes these details into a narrative that exemplifies the genius of African American culture.

Frazier's *The Notion of Family*—created mainly before 2013, the year of the selfie—is thickened by Frazier's use of allusion and by her presentation of the self as embedded in history. The self-portraits are less studies of Frazier than studies of Frazier as an emblem of Braddock. She surfaces not as an artist intent on dissecting herself but as an artist sounding the depths of the impact of growing up in Braddock, a predominantly African American community exposed to harsh environmental pollution. Here, then, the self is lost and found as the larger story facing the community that produced the self is exposed. I do not mean that Frazier is herself literally sacrificed. On the contrary, at the time of my writing, the artist is thriving and the work she produced in *The Notion of Family* has catapulted her to national prominence. Rather, the exploration of self, the young artist as the center of her own concern, is displaced, as opposed to—reaching back to other origins—Albrecht Dürer's portraits in which the young artist styles himself as a new figure of male power.[28] By contrast, Weems's *Kitchen Table*, arguably the series by which she stakes her claim as an artist, and Frazier's *The Notion of Family* position the artist's self as a lost-and-found emblem of a larger whole.

Faustine's *White Shoes* portraits are conceived and executed in something like selfie mode, and yet Faustine does not explore in these photographs what could be considered autobiography. The places she photographs herself are not places to which she has been drawn for personal pleasure. On the contrary, they are places marked by history. Rather than posing her reckoning with the history of enslavement in the United States in the American South—where slavery lasted much longer than in the North and where a secession attempted to retain the practice—Faustine poses herself in Brooklyn and in Manhattan, in sites where slavery made its earliest marks. These colonial spaces of enslavement our culture now largely ignores, but Faustine uses her body—in a performatively sacrificial mode—to instigate a renewed look at the history of the nation. In this sense, the "selfie" isn't really about her at all. Rather she uses her body as emblem, as mark.

Lost-and-Found

Lauren Cornell argues that only those selfies on Instagram that challenge our habits of consumption, that is, consuming the image, can be interpreted as art.[29] She singles out artists Amalia Ulman and Juliana Huxtable as deploying Instagram in a way that challenges our easy consumption of the medium. The question arises, then: Are Ullman and Huxtable creating selfies? Many of Huxtable's and Ulman's photographs fall within the mode of Instagram social media posts in that they directly engage the viewer as if to solicit response. This is the hallmark of social media, as Frosh points out, the calling for response.[30] Ulman and Huxtable stay well within the boundaries

of the selfie genre even as their photographs are obviously sharper and more visually and conceptually rich than the standard fare. Through their work we can see what defines the selfie: it is contained by social media. When Louis Althusser writes, "there is no ideology except by the subject and for the subject," he seems to predict the selfie that exists by the subject and for the subject.[31]

The self-portrait is not about eternal return, it is about acknowledgment of the ending of the self as the basis for the constitution of the self. As theorist Todd May argues, the ending of life, which is always connected to the closing of various sections and phases of life, creates identity.[32] In selfie practice, unlike the self-portrait, nothing ends, or rather nothing is *acknowledged* as ending. What is shown in an individual selfie cannot resist the overarching force of the frame of social media. It is this frame that dictates the elision of the affect of time and hence the suspension of the confrontation of identity.

James Tylor's daguerreotype self-portrait, exemplary of the genre, engages and interrogates cultural and colonialist history through the prism of the artist's turning his gaze on himself (figure 8.3). Of indigenous Australian, Maori, and European descent, Tylor's photographic works always invoke the violent history of European colonization of Australasia. His is a haunted oeuvre. His medium of photography is used critically and referentially to confront colonialist violence. Photography itself not only chronicled but also enacted the violence of colonization, as indigenous Australasians were photographed as specimens rather than humans.[33] Tylor's self-portrait daguerreotype blurs past and present. Because daguerreotype photography is a 19th-century technology, the image at first glance appears to be antique. Then we notice that the young man's clothes and hair are of the 21st century. Gazing at Tylor's daguerreotype

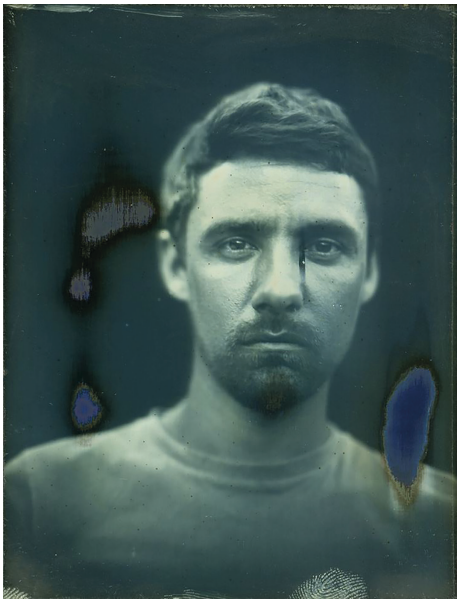

Figure 8.3 James Tylor, *Self-Portrait*, 2012, Becquerel daguerreotype, 4 × 5 in. Courtesy of the artist.

self-portrait, we are suspended between times, both 21st century and 19th century, an evocative liminality as the descendent of colonized people and their colonizers in image articulates the liminality of unresolved history. It is both Tylor's own, personal, unresolved history and also that of the violent colonization of Australasia. The photographer has allowed his chemicals to spill and blur, creating a look of unappeasable damage through which his face gazes up as through mist or miasma. The uncannily close and accurate detail with which daguerreotypes pick up physical textures shows the young man's neatly trimmed beard and wrinkled forehead.

In this staging of the confrontation of the self with the self, Tylor stares through history, through the history that his body contains—European, indigenous Australian, and Maori—and that he has learned from his most immediate ancestors. This photograph, as is inherent to the daguerreotype, is slowly and painstakingly made, with exposure to toxins a given in the daguerreotype process of image making. The self-portrait is meant for others to see—Tylor displays it on his website alongside his bio—yet it is also a processual conversation between the photographer and his ancestors, between himself and himself, whom he writes about eloquently as a person between cultures, European, Maori, and Aboriginal Australian. This uneasy and never predigested interrogation of identity makes Tylor's self-portrait an image that arrests us and absorbs our stares. It is impossible to imagine him making one-a-day images of this sort. Not because the labor involved in daguerreotype would make it exhausting and toxic (plenty of 19th-century photographers did as much), but rather because that intense engagement with self-scrutiny is not sustainable in quotidian life. The image is singular. Its status as daguerreotype makes it a one-off image. It is as far from selfie practice as one can go while still creating a self-image.

Consider that selfie is *precisely* sustainable (easily repeated) as a daily, more than daily, act because it does not encounter confrontation with the self. Francesca Woodman's self-images in a photo booth play through the temporal estrangement of the photograph but also are used as props in her other self-portraits, such that they become modes of visually healing or sealing together the fragmented self.[34] I contrast her use of these small self-images with the dominant mode of selfie. The selfie is by definition produced and reproduced without participant control of its former iterations; that control belongs to the social media platform. Enforced by technological time, the time stamp of the selfie precludes imaginative synthetic reunion of the image with the self. In this sense, Woodman's photo booth works are positioned as anti-selfies. Here, an adolescent girl veers from the script of self-presentation as composed for and toward the gazing, judging other, requisitioning the image to stage a return to human time, the frame of the body's awareness of its own mortality.

The Fold, the Seam

Critic Craig Owens in "Photography *en abyme*" describes a fold or seam where the image meets its exterior.[35] Similarly, Jacques Derrida argues in *Truth in Painting* that the frame of the image is the edge between the image-work and the world that creates the myth of the interior of the image.[36] I draw from their analyses to suggest that the fold or frame of the selfie is radically different from that of the self-portrait. The *frame* of the selfie is its place in social media practice. Once it is dislodged from that space it becomes something else, either in rare cases a self-portrait as such or more usually an example of visual trash, an image that exists but does not signify anything other than

its own passing existence.[37] The frame of the self-portrait includes a contestation of identity—a contestation of the self regarding the self.

The selfie is defined by an *agreement* on identity, that is, an agreement among watchers as to the image's intent. I do not suggest that there is a self or identity outside sociality.[38] But clearly there is a self that can be recognized as violated by sociality. This violative self is the core topic of the self-portrait: the self as woundable entity. As Lucas Samaras writes, "It takes pictures and it is pictures... it has temporality and through it I exist in a heightened state among others."[39] The "uncultivated field" that is the self in self-portrait photography is not reassuring and calming but disturbing and rough.[40]

Consider Lucas Samaras's *Auto-Polaroids* (1969) and his *Photo-Transformation* (1976). Consider Ellen Carey's Polaroid self-portraits (discussed in chapter seven). These images approach selfies in that, like selfies, they stage the photographic subject as photographer repeatedly before the camera. Unlike selfies they are not endlessly repetitious: they have a seriality that has beginning and end. Carey and Samaras also contend with the material, tactile, printmaking capacity of Polaroids. Unlike selfies, in Carey's Polaroid self-portraits and in Samaras's *Photo-Transformation* series, the enclosed space of the temporality of the self (that you, an embodied entity, exist for a time and not forever) merges with the enclosed space of the image's production. In creating these images that depend on Polaroids' materiality, through materiality the temporality of Carey's and Samaras's experimental auto-portrait series articulates a temporality of mortality. The image is mobile, then it is fixed. The life is fluent, then it is done. This encounter with the self inheres in the temporality of the project. Because selfie practice excludes its own ending it elides the frame of identity in temporality that, as Samaras eloquently notes, is an "uncultivated field." Because selfie practice can never declare its own material substrate, it presents always the consciously cultivated self. The selfie is always already a cultivated field, in the ever-fluent ticker tape of social media platforms.

Samaras's double exposure image in which he appears to be killing himself as his own uncanny double chills precisely because the image is not flawlessly bounded, it is not flawlessly fed into photo-editing-app perfection. Samaras appears to be bowing into a chair, while his double, also himself, appears to lean down to destroy him. The oversaturated lurid colors of the print, the overwrought details of the room, and its narrow compass move us away from the reality-television effect of selfie practice. Samaras's work instead makes us afraid to know that we are the thing that can destroy ourselves. A selfie could also convey this urgent convergence of self with self as an image, but it cannot do so within its frame of social media. The frame will always distort the encounter, making it an encounter among a person, AI, the reactions of the algorithm, and then other watchers coopted by the algorithm. In social media, we are never outside the gaze of AI, platforms, and algorithms.[41] We cannot ecstatically stand outside our selves but are bureaucratically forced to maintain capitalist decorum of self-containment. Carey's self-portrait Polaroids explore the painful reality of being a female artist, or an artist in a female body, the self haunted by its own materiality, a turn echoed in the distorted material spin of the Polaroid that Carey leverages.

Although, yes, the Carey and Samaras photographs I've just discussed are known to me because they inhabit museum and gallery space—and those spaces are also mediated spaces, controlled in class and status—galleries and museums do not have a gaze that controls everything before my eyes. They do not step between me and my

act of seeing photographs, they stand at the side. I do not suggest that spatial control of the gallery, museum, and fine-art market nexus has no meaning in capitalism. It has very problematic social import. But it also has limits. Social media AI algorithms net unlimited access to the data we provide when we look at images posted through social media. It is always there, it is the frame or the fold that secures the image. And the fold of social media is always already capitalist in its desire to sell *not* art but that which comes alongside image, whatever it is—shoes, makeup, earrings. This is a key difference. A gallery sells art and is clearly a space of capitalism. Social media pretends to give art away for free but behind the veil of its algorithms aggressively sells parallel products; then in the one-way double mirror that is data collection, it also sells what we bring to the table, ourselves as data.[42]

Alone

I close with a discussion of Nan Goldin's works as anti-selfies, positioned even so at the precipice of selfie practice. In Goldin's *Self-Portrait Alone* the fact of the photographer taking the images by herself in mundane situations makes the photographs seem like precursors to selfies.[43] But Goldin has emphatically denied that her work is akin to social media; the premise offends her. Given that her *Self-Portrait Alone* seem at first glance to be no different from contemporary selfies except that they were made with analog photographic technology, what aesthetic differences make Goldin's work unlike selfies? Vulnerability, flaws, sorrow, and what Foucault calls "the softest voice" creating a distance around the subject that puts at bay the very violence it encounters.[44] In *Self-Portrait Alone*, Goldin reveals bruises on her face and wounds that are not photo edited. She is facing herself alone, but in this image that records the violent attack she survived at the hands of her boyfriend, Brian, she is facing the ghostly presence of the other as it has marked her.

The question of whether photo editing could create realistic-looking wounds is beside the point when looking at Goldin's analog self-portraits. It could not create embodied wounds. This is a question that can be raised only by those who have never been wounded. The wound is visible aesthetically not so much on her skin but rather in Goldin's eyes, the way she holds her face. It is visible in the raw pale winter light, the unadulterated sense of strangeness of the exterior world, indicating she is not used to or comfortable being out of doors; her placement in a space that seems to be a courtyard but isn't really, but just a space between buildings, suggests she is somehow out of place, without a place. In the images down the center of the grid of *Self-Portrait Alone*, Goldin is almost disembodied, appearing only in mirrors; the images down the left of the grid show her breasts, show her touching her breast, show her lying down photographing herself couchant from above.

In *Self-Portrait Alone*, the theme of exploring embodied vulnerability while alone makes the frame or fold of the photographs the trace of the other's watching, yes; but more than that, it is the trace of what the other has done to the subject and what she remembers in her body, time as that which cannot be edited out because it is fate. She touches her breast, she shows her bruises, she watches herself cut apart (visually) by a mirror. The cuts in the photographs—the aesthetic of cuts—are the gaps through which the other haunts these images. Goldin's *Self-Portrait Alone* stages a precipice of self-reflective practice, the time of being alone. The difference is, the selfie is never the self alone.[45]

Notes

1 Geoffrey Batchen, *Photography Degree Zero: Reflections on Roland Barthes's Camera Lucida* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009).
2 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 2010).
3 Edmund Husserl, *Experience and Judgment: Investigations in a Genealogy of Logic*, trans. James S. Churchill and Karl Ameriks (London: Routledge, 1973).
4 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 7–8.
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